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AN
HISTORICAL VIEW
OF
HERESIES,
AND
VINDICATION
OF THE

PRIMITIVE FAITH.

BY ASA M'FARLAND, A. M.
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, IN CONCORD,
NEW-HAMPSHIRE.

"Remember the days of old; consider the years of
many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew
thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee."
MOSES.

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Preface.

THE design of the following short Treatise, was suggested to the Author on reading Dr. Jamieson's excellent Vindication of the doctrine of Scripture, and of the Primitive Faith, concerning the Deity of Christ.

It occurred to him, that but few, except scholars and professional men, would become acquainted with that learned work; at the same time, he thought it might be a mean of establishing some in the orthodox faith, when they are informed how the primitive Christians viewed and treated certain sentiments which have been revived in the present age.

He has availed himself of some of the many quotations which the above mentioned writer has taken from the Fathers, together with the testimony of Du Pin, and other more modern historians.

He presumes not to aver, that he has been perfectly accurate as it respects the dates of events which he has brought into view, nor:

that the style and manner of writing will bear the strictest criticism. In this respect, he pleads the candor and indulgence of those into whose hands this may fall. Thus far he does not hesitate to declare, that he has not intentionally misrepresented any fact, nor given any undue coloring to the opinions of others. As far as he has given his own opinion; or offered reasons to establish a particular system of doctrine, he asks no other indulgence than this, that his opinions and arguments be examined in the light of the Gospel.

Some, who have been accustomed to consider religion as consisting in the exercise of a pretended charity which confounds truth and error, will consider it as very illiberal to advance any decisive opinion respecting Heresy. This will indeed be consistent with their views of the nature of charity; for if the sentiments which men embrace will have but small or no influence in determining their character and moral state, or if it be of no material consequence to men what they believe, there is no such thing as a Heresy which tends to destroy the soul.—Let it be remembered, however, that this conclusion is in opposition to express Scripture declaration.

We are assured, that there is Heresy which destroys the soul. Christians are forewarned to expect Heresies from age to age. They are told how they are to conduct towards Heretics. They are to consider those who obstinately adhere to errors which pervert the nature and moral tendency of the Gospel, as having forfeited the character and privileges of Christians ; and to separate from them, and have no Christian fellowship with them.

As it is our duty to judge in ourselves what is right, it cannot be unreasonably bold to offer an opinion respecting Heresy, and to advance reasons for the support of that opinion.

Besides, one may safely declare, on proper authority, what was called Heresy in former times, without the imputation of illiberality. And the primitive Christians not only believed the existence of Heresy, but they felt themselves authorized to designate the particular sentiments that constitute the Heresy which the Scriptures condemn. They considered themselves bound to judge and separate Heretics from their communion.

Such, at present, is the state of religious opinions among us, that it has become import-

ant for even plain, unlearned, though sincere Christians, to see distinctly where lies the point of difference between that scheme of doctrine which is called orthodox; and those which, under different names, depart essentially from that scheme. This has been one object in the ensuing work; and the Author is satisfied and happy, if any, on reading it, shall be enabled to discern, more clearly, this point of difference, and also to contrast the moral tendency of the orthodox with other systems of doctrine.

HISTORICAL VIEW

OF

Heresies.

CHAP. I.

General principles by which Heresy may be known.

WHEN we are forewarned in Scripture, that men shall depart from the faith,* that they shall privily bring in damnable Heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them;† and when we are instructed to reject an obstinate Heretic, knowing that he who is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself;‡ we are bound to believe the existence of Heresy; and it is our safety and interest to examine the nature and moral tendency of doctrines.

It will be for our interest to be determined in our own minds respecting religious senti-

* 1 Tim. iv. 1. † 2 Peter ii. 1. ‡ Titus iii. 10, 12.

ments, whether they agree with, or essentially depart from, the spirit of the Gospel, if we would avoid the dreadful condemnation which will be the portion of those who pervert the Gospel of Christ.

It is to little purpose that the word Heresy was originally used to designate a sect. It is admitted, that in this sense it may be applied to each distinct denomination of Christians. It will be said moreover, that one denomination has an equal right with another, to apply it to all who differ in sentiment from them.— But as the inspired writers use it, in the passages before quoted, it has a principal respect to the opinions which men receive. St. Peter has informed us what that Heresy is which is damnable, or which tends to the perdition of men, even a denial of the Lord that bought them. It is obvious, that he meant a departure from the truth and spirit of the Gospel, which will finally exclude a person from the Kingdom of Heaven. In this sense, it implies not merely a circumstantial difference in sentiment from others, but an apostacy from the spirit and design of the Gospel: it is an adherence to sentiments which essentially change the scheme of Christianity, and counteract those effects which the Gospel, in its purity, is calculated to produce in the hearts and lives of men.

Each system of religion, which has appeared in the world, has had some distinguishing characteristic, something peculiar, by which it

differs from others. They all rest on their own peculiar and distinct foundations.

The foundation of natural religion, is the belief of a supreme Power, who made and who governs the world. That of the Jewish religion is a belief, that the God, who made and governs the world, spoke to the people of Israel, and dispensed the law to them by the ministry of Moses. The Mahometan religion has this for its foundation, that there is one God, and that he has communicated his will and purposes to men, in a revelation to Mahomet, his prophet. Christianity, also, has certain general principles that are peculiar to itself, which make it a dispensation essentially different from all others.

As the foundation of natural religion is a belief in God, as the Creator and Governor of the world; it appears manifest, that Christianity rests on this truth, that God has manifested himself to the world by Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son. In this manifestation, he is revealed to us in a relation which was not known before the publication of that revelation which we have in the Scriptures. Besides the relations in which we stand to him as a Creator and Governor, in this manifestation he is a Redeemer and Savior; for the Son of God was manifested to take away sin.*—This makes the Christian scheme essentially different from every other religion.

1. John, iii. 5.

If Christianity rests on this foundation, it is necessary that we believe that Jesus Christ has made such atonement and satisfaction to the divine law, that God can pardon the returning sinner consistently with his holiness and justice, and reinstate him in the privileges and blessings which were forfeited by transgression; and that there is no way of pardon and life but through a faith which is the effect of a divine operation.

But the nature of this mediatorial work of Jesus Christ makes it necessary that we receive and treat him as God over all. The reason is obvious. No created being can perform more than the duty which he personally owes to God. Let his powers be ever so great and ample, as they are the gift of God, he owes the exercise of those powers to him. Much less can a created being make satisfaction to a law of infinite purity and extent, which will prove effectual to atone for offenders. None of them can, by any means, redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever.—Therefore a proper atonement for sin rests on the supreme Deity of the Savior. And as the Gospel is a manifestation of Jesus Christ, who is the propitiation for sin, through faith in his blood; and further, as this faith is the gift of God, and the immediate effect of his operation; it is with the greatest propriety called a dispensation of Grace. It offers salvation to sinners, as the effect of divine Grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. If this be the spirit of the Christian dispensation, it is

manifest that whatever takes away that from the Gospel which is peculiar to it, or which makes it any other than a dispensation of Grace, is Heresy.—He is an Heretic, in the Scripture sense of the word, who adheres to those opinions which encourage him to hope for salvation in any other way than through the merit of a perfect atonement, and by a vital union with Christ. He receives another Gospel than that which offers salvation as the effect of divine Grace alone. At least, he perverts the Gospel, and embraces sentiments that counteract those effects which it was intended, and is calculated, to produce. That must be a perversion of the Gospel, which alters its spirit and tendency, or takes away that peculiar character which distinguishes it from other systems of religion.

A distinction is to be maintained between an error in judgment and Heresy. Not every one who is in an error is an Heretic, though every Heretic embraces essential error. It is a possible case, that persons may be in such situations that the truth is concealed from them while their hearts are not opposed to it. Therefore the temper of the heart comes into consideration in determining the nature of Heresy.—That person, whose heart is not opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, tho' he may embrace error through wrong instruction, will receive the truth when it is fairly exhibited with proper evidence. He is ready to receive information. He is open to conviction. He is not an Heretic, even while he is in an error.

But he who, with means and opportunity to know the truth, rejects it, because he desires to rid himself of doctrines which oppose the prevailing disposition of a corrupt heart, and embraces sentiments which pervert the true design of the Gospel, because they are agreeable to a carnal mind; if that person persists in his error, he is doubtless an Heretic. It is evident, that an evil heart of unbelief has influenced him to depart from the living God, and from the essential truths of his word. He embraces an error which destroys the soul; for by rejecting that Grace which is the only proposed ground of pardon and salvation, he excludes himself from its saving benefits.

CHAP. II.

All Heresies are known by the same general character, though they have appeared under different names.

IT has been no inconsiderable occasion of scandal, and reproach, that the religious world has been so divided in opinion. That so many religious sects pretend to receive the articles of their faith from one source, and that such various constructions are given to the doctrines of Scripture, has been, at once, matter of grief and wonder to good men, and of triumph to

infidels. The latter inquire, and it would seem that they consider it an insurmountable difficulty, if God has communicated to men a system of divine truth, in which their everlasting interest is concerned, would it not be reasonable to expect that the essential doctrines of this system should be so obvious that all men would be agreed in them? This objection, to the divinity of the Scriptures, is plausible only in appearance. Those who make it, are careful to conceal the true cause of this disagreement, respecting the doctrines of Scripture. They would have it considered, that the temper of the heart has no material influence on the judgment of men, in view of divine truth. If it were said, we might reasonably expect that all men, whose hearts are well disposed towards the holy nature of the Gospel, would be of one mind respecting its essential doctrines, there would be much truth in the remark.

The writer would not consider all goodness as confined to one sect of Christians, sensible, that from various causes, men who are not in heart opposed to the truth, may embrace errors which, in themselves, are pernicious. Still there is reason to believe, that good men have been, and still are, agreed respecting those doctrines which are essential to the Gospel, when they have enjoyed proper means of information. It is a truth well known, that there are several distinct denominations of Christians who differ in no essential article of faith. In the opinions of good men, there will be some slight shades of difference, without affecting

their agreement in the essential truths of Christianity. Moreover, by the force of temptation, or the peculiar circumstances in which men are placed, they may, for a time at least, incline to dangerous errors. Still when the essential doctrines of the Gospel are fairly exhibited, it is believed, not that good men will necessarily rank themselves under one denomination, and all become Presbyterians, or Congregationalists, or Episcopalians, or Baptists; but that they will harmonize in those essential truths.

Jesus Christ has himself furnished ground for this belief. To some of the unbelieving Jews he said, If any man will do his (i. e. the Father's) will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.* In another place, he told them, with great plainness, that the cause of their unbelief was an alienation of heart from the spirit of divine truth; affirming moreover, that those who, in heart, are conformed to the divine character, will receive the truth. He that is of God, heareth God's words. He makes a direct application of the consequence to those who rejected his doctrines. Ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.†

If the foregoing remarks are just, (and it will be admitted that those which are quoted from the words of Christ are so) they will prove that Heresy, or dangerous error, has its origin in one source, and that is a heart which is not

* John vii. 17

† John viii. 47.

reconciled to the Gospel terms of salvation.—When the governing disposition of the heart is opposed to any truth, men will endeavor to evade its force and meaning; and sometimes the most slight pretences serve to uphold them in opposition. In the ordinary transactions of human life, experience evinces, that it requires greater force of evidence to gain the assent of men to that which is opposed to their preconceived views and prejudices, than would be necessary to carry conviction where there is no previous opposition. When doctrines are exhibited which strike at the root of their governing passion, whether it be pride or lust, the passion must itself be brought under subjection, before men will yield to the truth. If there be in man an evil heart of unbelief, which does not accord with the humiliating terms of the Christian dispensation, there is no wonder why those truths, which make the Gospel essentially different from every other system of religion, should be rejected.

There is a system of doctrine, which has been generally called orthodox; not that any set of men have assumed this distinction; but it has been used, as a distinctive term, by the opposers as well as the friends of the system. The articles which pertain to the orthodox faith, are often, and with propriety, called the doctrines of Grace. These doctrines are exhibited, in order, in the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England, and in the Westminster Confession of Faith. These, we shall see, were the doctrines of the Reformation.

They, who embrace this system, believe that our race, though originally created upright, have become universally depraved; and destitute of any degree of true holiness, previous to a renovation by Grace. They believe the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, as a truth clearly taught in the Scriptures; and absolutely necessary, in order that he may be a proper object of faith, and a competent person to make atonement. They believe, moreover, that God, of his mere pleasure, from eternity, chose some of the human race to holiness, and eternal life—that whom he thus chose from eternity, he calls effectually, in time, by his Spirit, renews in them a holy temper, and by the same Spirit, applies the atonement to them, and seals them to the day of final redemption. Believers are consequently justified, and made accepted through the atonement.

The general statement of the orthodox scheme which has here been given, may be summed up in these few words: That mankind have destroyed themselves; but their salvation is wholly of God: and therefore they are saved in a way which excludes every occasion of boasting.—Let the reader keep this general truth in view, and consider it as the sum of that scheme which is called orthodox. Let him examine it in all its relations; for if this be admitted, it may be proved, that the doctrines which are here stated, result from it as its unavoidable consequences. If our salvation be wholly the work of God, it must appear exceedingly evident, that the plan also, by which,

believers are saved, was of his own contrivance.—He not only knew whom he would save, but chose them to holiness and everlasting life, and appointed the means by which they should come to that knowledge of the truth which will issue in salvation. If our salvation be of God, he must determine, at some time, whom he would save; and as in his mind there is no variableness nor shadow of turning, he must have determined who should be the heirs of salvation from eternity. To assert the contrary, we must say that God acts without design, which is inconsistent with the character of an intelligent being: much more is it inconsistent with the character of HIM who is the Source of intelligence.

Again, if mankind have ruined themselves, it is evident that they need a divine influence, to raise them up from this state of ruin, to that holiness without which they cannot have communion with God in his kingdom of glory; and, if their salvation be of God, the conclusion is unavoidable, that he calls those, whom he chose, by an effectual influence, out of darkness into his marvellous light, and renews in them that divine image which they have lost.

But if the human race have ruined themselves by transgression, justice requires satisfaction in their condemnation. How can they be saved? Will repentance be accepted, as an atonement for past offences? Repentance is no atonement; and if God should remit the

sentence without a satisfaction, he would not be manifested as the righteous Governor of the world. Hence results the necessity, that ONE, who is competent to make complete atonement, should interpose, take our nature upon him, magnify the law and make it honorable, that God may consistently pardon the returning sinner, and reinstate him in the privileges and blessings which he has forfeited.

This is expressly exhibited as the end of the Savior's mission. It is said of believers, that they are justified freely of Grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare (or manifest) his righteousness, for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.* Therefore, those who were chosen, in Christ, before the foundation of the world, are effectually called, in time; the redemption is applied to them; and they are justified and made accepted in the Beloved.—It is equally evident, if salvation be of God, that whom he chose to salvation, called, and justified, he will keep by his power; and not one of them will fail of eternal life.

Thus it appears, that those leading doctrines which pertain to the orthodox system, are the natural consequences of the general propo-

* Rom. iii. 24, 25, 26.

sition, that our salvation is of God. The reader will at once see, that the truth here stated is adapted to suppress pride, and beget an humble frame of mind. If we admit this, with all its consequences, it strips us of every occasion of boasting. If we say salvation is not wholly the work of God, but wholly, or in part, of ourselves; or if we receive a system of doctrines which will imply this; boasting, instead of being excluded, will be established; and we shall admit that we, independently, have something whereof to glory.

The truths which result from this scheme, are called the doctrines of Grace, because they ascribe the salvation of men alone to the free Grace of God, manifested in Christ Jesus. If the Scriptures teach us that salvation is wholly of God, it will follow, according to the principles which were laid down in the former chapter, that they who receive and propagate opinions which counteract the spirit and tendency of this truth, are justly chargeable with Heresy.

One portion of mankind have always adhered to these doctrines of Grace; that is, they have admitted, in all its consequences, this general proposition, that salvation is the work of God. Another part have rejected these doctrines, and embraced sentiments which remove from the mind a sense of the creature's dependence on divine Grace, for holiness and everlasting life. In this light, whatever variety of names and sects there are in the re-

ligious world, men may be divided into two classes only, those who receive the doctrines of Grace, and those who reject them.

If it will be deemed illiberal to pronounce which of these two corresponds with the spirit of Christianity, it is abundantly evident, that between them there is an essential difference. He who believes that salvation is wholly of God, embraces a scheme of doctrine which differs essentially from that of him who believes it to be wholly, or in part, the work of the creature. They hold up the divine character in different relations. They are different in their spirit and moral tendency. One represents God as a holy Sovereign, and mankind as his dependent subjects. The other, in effect, tends to remove the impression of absolute dependence. One is calculated to check and mortify the pride of the heart. The other upholds pride; at least, it furnishes an occasion for self-complacency and boasting.

We have observed, that Heresy has its source in an evil heart, which influences men to depart from the living God, and from the essential truths of his word; therefore there is a sameness in its origin. Let it now be observed, that what has, by the orthodox, been considered Heresy, has been distinguished by one general character. It has appeared under different names, according to the spirit of each successive age, or those persons who have taken a distinguished part. It has sometimes experienced certain alterations in its external

form ; yet its general character and spirit have been the same.

Let the reader be again reminded of that general proposition, as expressing the spirit of the orthodox scheme, that salvation is of God. When this is exhibited in all its relations, to men, they will take their respective sides. Either they will yield to this truth, and admit its consequences ; or they will frame a system of doctrine, which takes the whole, or some part of this work from God, and puts it into the hands of the creature. This is therefore the point of the orthodox plan, where Heresy takes its departure, as will be seen in the prosecution of the subject. It has refused, either wholly or in part, to ascribe this work to God. Here it separates from the scheme of Grace, and pursues a system which furnishes some occasion of self-complacency and ground for boasting. The principal or only difference among the various plans which have separated from the orthodox, is, that some are removed to a greater distance from the point here stated, than others : but this is a difference only in degree. One system of doctrines may be so constructed, that it will more entirely exclude the necessity of divine influence than another, and yet between both there may be no essential difference. It must appear evident, with a slight view of the orthodox plan, that it is calculated to meet with opposition. Pride naturally aims at independence ; and men, while under the influence of pride, are inclined to evade those doctrines which proclaim their en-

tire dependence on God, for that pardon and grace which will fit them for Heaven. This consideration is alone sufficient to account for all that opposition to the doctrines of Grace, which any age has witnessed.

Before we leave this subject, a few remarks will be offered, respecting that mutual relation which is observable in the doctrines of Grace. They all stand in connection with the Divinity and perfect atonement of Jesus Christ. If he be not a divine Person, or if God were not manifest in the flesh to take away sin, it is evident, that there has been no proper atonement for sin. If the most exalted creature be dependent on God, for his existence and faculties, it is obvious, that he is bound to love and serve him, with all these faculties; and if, when he has served his Maker, to the extent of his power, he has done no more than his own duty, it is evident, that he can make no proper satisfaction for the offences of others.

If no atonement has been made for sin, it is a reasonable conclusion, that none was necessary for the justification and final happiness of the human race. From this last conclusion, another will no less evidently follow, which is, that mankind are not in guilt, and under the curse; for if they are guilty before God, and have come under the condemning sentence of the law, an atonement is unquestionably necessary to deliver them from condemnation, and reinstate them in the divine favor. If this conclusion be just, there is no necessity for di-

vine influence to renew and sanctify the heart, and form it to a fitness for the service and enjoyment of the heavenly state. In this case, it would be improper to say, that any are justified and saved by Grace. There is no special manifestation of Grace, in establishing those in everlasting life, who never violated the condition on which life was at first suspended.

We see to what conclusions we shall be led, if we deny the supreme Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. It will lead us to a renunciation of those doctrines which result from an atonement. It is the basis of that scheme of faith which is called orthodox. It is interwoven with the doctrines and institutions of the Gospel, and affects every branch of our religious worship. If this, more than any other article, characterizes the Gospel, those who reject it change the very nature of the dispensation. If it be not a doctrine that is taught in Scripture, Christianity is another and very different thing from that which the orthodox have received. The difference cannot be called circumstantial merely. It is essential. It not only affects that religious worship which we offer; it will enter into all our views respecting the great truths of Christianity, and the nature and importance of moral obligation.

It is necessary that we be established respecting this leading article; and examine with care the account which the Scriptures give respecting the character of Christ. This will be attempted, before we proceed to any historical view of religious opinions.

CHAP. III.

The Scripture account of the character of Christ.

SECTION I.

WHEN we consider those interesting relations in which we stand to the great Author of Christianity, it might, with reason, be expected, that if, on any religious subject, mankind could agree, they would be of one mind respecting his character. The views which we entertain of him must, in the issue, determine the nature of our worship, and faith, and practice. Indeed as we have seen, the character which he sustains will determine the spirit of those doctrines which we are to believe. If he be God, and were manifested in flesh to take away sin, the Gospel is a dispensation of divine Grace. If he were but a man, or creature only, the Gospel is another thing. The last supposition makes it a scheme different, in its whole construction, from the former.

Mankind are not yet agreed respecting this important article. In the earliest ages of Christianity, this was a subject of dispute; and all that controversy which it excited in the primitive times, is revived in the present age. Some suppose him to be no more than

man, though favored more than others with the gift of inspiration. Others suppose him to be the highest among created beings, though not the self-existent God. Others conceive him to be the second Person in the Godhead, united to the man Jesus. This latter opinion is that of the orthodox, which we shall attempt to vindicate.

It is not pretended here to exhibit any thing new on a subject which has been laboriously investigated by the most able men. We will only attend to some of the most obvious proofs to establish the supreme Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Before we enter on the direct proof, let it be observed that we do not pretend to comprehend this doctrine. It is deemed a mystery. That one Being should subsist in three Persons, is a mode of existence different from any that comes within our experience.

But it would not afford very manifest proof of our humility and teachable disposition, if we reject all that is not within the compass of our reason. It would look somewhat like setting bounds to the counsels, and designs, and revelations of the Most High. We might previously expect that a revelation, from the infinite God, would contain truths above our finite comprehension, unless we suppose our reason can fully investigate the nature of the divine plan, and the ground and reason of the divine operation.

If we reject this doctrine, because we cannot comprehend it, must we not, for a like reason, discard the doctrine of one God who is self-existent and eternal? We cannot comprehend how one Being should subsist in three Persons, because this is a mode of existence, with which we are not acquainted. We cannot comprehend how one God should exist of himself without beginning, for this also is a mode of existence, with which we are as little acquainted. Therefore we must reject both of these articles, if the consideration that we cannot comprehend a doctrine, affords sufficient reason for unbelief. Whatever some pretend to the contrary, yet is it, with reason, believed that the Apostle refers to this incomprehensible doctrine, and instructs us to receive it as a mystery, when he says, Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of Angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

Again, when we say that Jesus Christ is God, we admit that in the economy of redemption, he appeared as Mediator between God and man, as God's servant. In this character he was officially inferior to the Father; as he, who is sent on an embassy, is inferior to the one who appoints and sends him.

When he speaks of himself as Mediator,

* 1. Tim. iii. 16.

and of the work which, in this character, he was to perform, we might expect he would express himself in a manner which implies inferiority. In this he maintained a distinction among the Persons of the Trinity, and spake a language which was in correspondence with that particular character which he sustained in the economy of redemption. There is no inconsistency in supposing him to be God, though as God-man, Mediator, he could with propriety say, My Father is greater than I. When he is called the servant of the Lord, or said to be sanctified and sent by the Father into the world, and made head over all things to the Church; or when, in short, we find expressions implying that he acted by a delegated authority, we may suppose these declarations are made in reference to the offices which he sustained as Mediator. If there is direct proof of his Deity, such expressions will not invalidate it, when we consider him as acting in a subordinate office. He might be God, and yet take upon him the form of a servant, and act in such a character as would render all those expressions, which imply inferiority, proper to him in this character.

Furthermore, it is observable respecting the inspired writers, especially the evangelists, that they did not write like men who were engaged in controversy. They manifested nothing of that precaution, in the statement of particular truths, which men generally use, who have an adversary within their immediate view. Deeply impressed with the

truths which they recorded, though they undoubtedly were aware that men of corrupt minds would pervert the truth, yet they appear not to have had respect to the disputes and criticisms, which, in succeeding ages, would be excited about the true meaning of their record. It was their principal aim to give a history of the life, miracles, and sayings of Jesus. Therefore, if we except St. John, we do not find them giving a formal proof that their Master was God as well as man; or declaring, in so many words, that he is God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person. They were satisfied to exhibit his character as it might be inferred from his own declarations and from his works. The proof of his Divinity, however, appears in their account of his life and doctrines. In too many places to enumerate, it occurs, as it were, incidentally in their writings. It is implied in their conduct towards him, and in his towards them.

1. It may be inferred from his own conduct, that he is God as well as man.

It will be granted, that to offer religious worship to a creature, is idolatry. It is giving to a creature the glory that belongs only to the Creator. If so, it is not less impious for a creature to receive such worship, with approbation, when it is offered. Such a creature would be guilty of the high criminality of assuming that honor which God claims wholly to himself.

Jesus Christ received religious worship without rebuking those who offered it, or intimating that they mistook the object of worship. And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him. There came a certain ruler and worshipped him. When he came into the ship, after saving Peter from drowning, they who were in the ship came and worshipped him. And the disciples worshipped him in Galilee. If any suppose that the worship, spoken of in these passages, was not the worship that is proper to a divine Person, but only a token of civil respect to a superior; the worship which Thomas offered was not allowable, if it were offered to a creature. He invoked him as his God, as well as Lord; and Jesus approved and accepted the homage which he paid.

We grant that the respect which was paid to earthly kings and persons of eminence is often called worship; yet we have reason to suppose, that the worship which was offered to Jesus, even in the days of his flesh, was of the religious kind. We are certain that he knew perfectly well with what intention his disciples and others worshipped him; for he knew what was in man, and needed not that any should testify of him. If he were but a creature, and knew that they worshipped him as God, he was bound to correct their mistake; and direct their worship to God, who is the only proper object of that religious homage. On these suppositions he was certainly guilty of the

greatest impiety in suffering himself to be made the object of a worship which did not belong to him.

If it were for once admitted, that the worship, which was offered, was intended as a token of civil respect, yet this would have been unsuitable to the character which he maintained as a man. He disclaimed all distinction of this kind. He declared that his kingdom was not of this world ; and he even condescended to perform the office of a servant to his disciples.

With such professions, it would have been unsuitable for him to receive a worship which was understood as implying a civil distinction. If he be not God, religious worship was not only improper but impious ; and if it were not religious worship, it did not accord with his profession of disclaiming all worldly honor and distinction. But every doubt, respecting the propriety of offering religious worship to Christ, must be removed, when we read that it is the will, and express command of God, that he should be worshipped by Angels. And when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the Angels of God worship him.* Can it be supposed that God is declaring his will with all this solemnity, that all the Angels should worship Christ, if he intends no more than an act of complaisance, or token of civil respect ?

* Heb. i. 6.

It is undeniable that the Apostles worshipped him after his ascension. They ascribed to him everlasting praise and dominion, and blessed the Churches in his name. What act of religious worship can be offered more directly to the infinite God, than that which the heavenly host offer to the Lamb that was slain, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing; and every creature which is in Heaven, and the earth, and under the earth, heard I, saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever. And the four beasts or living creatures said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth forever and ever.*

Any comment on this passage may be deemed unnecessary. We only observe, every creature in Heaven and the earth, and under the earth, ascribe equal honor to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain. The Lamb is either God, or one among the creatures in the general enumeration. If he be one of the creatures, it cannot give us a high opinion of his humility, and reverence for the Supreme, that he should unite with other creatures in offering the same praise to himself with that which is ascribed to God.

* Rev. v. 12, 13, 14.

2. If Jesus Christ were but a creature, and if he acted by a delegated authority, it was improper for him to perform miracles in his own name. If he were faithful to him who sent him, he would have given sufficient intimation that he performed those wonderful works, not by his own authority and power, that the honor might be given to God. Faithfulness would prompt him to guard the Church against the sin of idolatry, by disclaiming all pretensions of performing divine works in his own name.

It was no strange thing to the Jews, that a creature should work miracles by divine authority. Such a power was delegated to Moses and Elijah. The disciples of Jesus also wrought miracles, but without any pretensions that they possessed such power of themselves. In the history of the Acts * we have the account of a lame man, who was miraculously cured by Peter. But the miracle was wrought in the name of Jesus; and evidently by a power that was derived from him. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk. Hence the disciples ascribed all their power to him, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject to us, through thy name.† And this is not all; for he confined them to this manner of operation. In my name shall they cast out devils; and they shall speak with new tongues.‡

The disciples declared, it was through

* Chap. ii. 6. † Luke x. 17. ‡ Mark xvi. 17.

faith in the name of Jesus, that they received power from him to work miracles. When the multitude marvelled at the cure of a lame man, Peter thus addressed them, And his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong : yea, the faith, which is by him, hath given him this perfect soundness. §

As the disciples of Jesus wrought miracles in his name, and by authority which they received from him, it was proper for him to do such works by his own authority, and in his own name. This, we find, was his manner of operation. Hence, when he cast out an unclean spirit, the spectators were amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this ? for with authority and power, he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.* It is evident that they had not been accustomed to such language and to such a manner of operation before. They declared that the manner of operation was, to them, new, and surprizing. In the cure of the paralytic, recorded in the second chapter of Mark, they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion. But why was it a thing so strange that a man should be miraculously cured of the palsy ? They could not be ignorant that Moses, Elijah, and others, had wrought miracles. Their surprise evidently arose from the authoritative manner by which the miracle was done. Here they see one who performs divine works, by a word of command : and without acknowledging a dependence on any power but his own.

Jesus appealed to the works which he wrought, as affording manifest proof that he was in the Father, and the Father in him; or that they were one. If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not: but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know, and believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me.*

Here he declared himself to be the agent in the same sense, as was the Father.

When the woman came behind him, in the press, and touched the hem of his garment, it is said, a cure was effected in her, by virtue having gone out of him. He expressed his authority in the language of rebuke. He rebuked the wind; and said to the sea, Peace, be still, and the wind ceased: and there was a great calm.†

The opposers of Christ's divinity attempt to evade the argument which results from those divine works that he performed, by alledging that he acted in a subordinate capacity, and by a delegated authority.

But if he acted by a derived power, it seems extraordinary that he could confer this power on others. If he were dependent upon God for the power to work miracles, as well as his disciples, it seems proper that, whenever a miracle was to be wrought by them, they should receive the power immediately from God, and

* John x. 37, 38.

† Mark iv, 39.

not from a subordinate agent. Then they would not be exposed to mistake. They would know on whom they depended, and to whom they were to give the honour. Jesus Christ himself claimed the prerogative of conferring this power upon his disciples. I give unto you power to tread on serpents, and over all the power of the enemy.* In correspondence with this, we read of Paul, and Barnabas, that they spake boldly in the Lord, who gave testimony to the word of his grace: and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.† Could he confer such power unless it were in him, as its proper subject? If he could not, it is undeniable that he is God, as well as man.

3. Sin is an offence against God, and it belongs to him alone to forgive the offender. If any creature should presume to exercise this prerogative, it will amount, at least, to a claim of partnership in the divine sovereignty; for the forgiveness of sin is, in a peculiar sense, a sovereign act.

The Jewish scribes were right, when they called it blasphemy for a creature to claim the exercise of this divine prerogative. If Jesus Christ were but a creature, as they conceived, it was with justice that they charged him with blasphemy, when he claimed the right to forgive sins. And behold, they brought unto him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed. And Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be

* Luke x. 19. † Acts xiv. 3.

forgiven thee.* And behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. It is said, Jesus knew their thoughts. If so, he knew on what ground they charged him with blasphemy in their own minds ; that, supposing him to be a man only, he claimed a prerogative of God. This was the ground of their charge : for in the parallel passage of St. Mark, we read of their reasoning farther, Who can forgive sins, but God only ? But what was the method which he took to repel this high charge ? He did not reason with them, to shew that a creature, without being justly chargeable with blasphemy, might claim the right to forgive sins ; but he proceeded to prove, by a miracle, that he possessed this power, of himself ; and that even in his humiliation. For whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee ; or to say, Arise, and walk. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power, on earth, to forgive sins, then said he to the sick of the palsy, Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thine house. It must appear very evident, that the miracle was wrought, not to prove that a creature might forgive sins ; but that he possessed this power, as God ; and that he was not justly charged with blasphemy.

St. Paul speaks of it as the common faith of believers, that they have forgiveness of sins, in or by Christ. Even as Christ forgave you, so do ye.†

Some will perhaps say, that the power to

* Matt. ix. 2. † Col. iv. 13.

forgive sins, was committed to him as a subordinate agent, seeing it is said, God hath exalted him to be a Prince, and Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

It may be observed in reply, that a power may be said to be delegated to Christ as Mediator, or to the human nature united to the second Person in the Godhead, which he possessed independently as God. And without doubt the human nature was highly exalted, to be personally united to the Godhead, so as to perform divine works.

4. It is unnecessary to enumerate the places of Scripture, in which Christ is called the Son of God, as well as the Son of man; or where he claimed equality with the Father. The Jews, it appears, considered his claim of being the Son of God, as amounting to a claim of equality with the Father. Especially when they heard him say, I and my Father are one. They considered the declaration to be an assertion of his divinity. It is evident, from the issue, that they did not misconceive his meaning. If they misunderstood him, he was bound, by the plainest principles of honesty and faithfulness, to rectify their mistake, and give them correct impressions, respecting his character.

On a certain occasion, the Jews took up stones to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from the Father. For which of these works do ye stone

me? They answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy: and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.* It is evident, that they understood, from his own declaration, that he meant to claim a divine nature, or equality with God.

If they received wrong impressions, from what he had said, it was a duty, which he owed to God, to them, and himself, to rectify the mistake. Their charge rested on this one point, that he being, as they supposed, a man, made himself God. If it were a mistake, it might have been easily rectified. He had only to say, you misconceived my meaning, I would not be understood, by any thing that I have said or done, as claiming equality with God.

But he gave them no other impressions, than those which they had already received; unless it were the more to confirm them in the belief that he rested his claim on the divine nature. He proceeded to reason from the less, to the greater. Is it not written in your law, I said ye or gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came; and the Scriptures cannot be broken; say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God? Immediately, he appeals to those divine works which he had performed to prove the justness of his claim to divinity. If I do not the works of my Father, believe me

* John x. 32, 33.

not : but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him. It is manifest that the Jews still considered him to be guilty of blasphemy, because he did not renounce the claim of equality with God. Accordingly they were about to proceed with him, as the law directed in cases of blasphemy : but he escaped out of their hands.

In a discourse with his disciples he said, If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also : and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. He appeared to manifest surprise at the unbelief of Philip. Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip ? He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father ; and how sayest thou then, shew us the Father ? Believest thou not, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me ? The words, that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself : but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.*

5. Names and titles are, in Scripture, given to Christ, which are proper to God only. The self-existent Jehovah is said to be jealous for his holy name ; and his glory he will not give to another. We might expect, that the inspired writers would be peculiarly cautious how they give those titles to a creature, by which God maketh himself known ; and that in this

* John xiv. 7, 8, 9, 10.

particular, there would be sufficient guards against the sin of idolatry. A few only will be mentioned, of the many passages where a divine name is appropriated to Christ.

St. Paul, speaking of the privileges pertaining to the Jewish nation, says, Of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God, blessed forever.*

To the elders of the Church at Ephesus, Feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.† It is very evident, that the Church is redeemed, by the blood of Christ; and therefore he is God; for the Scripture, here quoted, cannot be distorted into any form, to make it mean any other than that he, who purchased the Church with his own blood, is God.

The divinity and atonement of Christ are intimately connected. A creature cannot make satisfaction to a law of infinite purity and extent, for the offences of other creatures. In order to make that satisfaction, which is implied in atonement, he must do something beyond the duty which he owes to God. No creature can love God more than with all his heart, nor serve him beyond his power. Therefore it was necessary that God should be manifested in the flesh to take away the guilt of sin. It would be deemed a strange doctrine indeed, if any were to say the Church is the property

* Rom. ix. 5.

† A&S ix. 28.

of a creature. We are the property of God; and it is impossible for any creature to obtain that absolute right over us which belongs to him. The Apostle does not say of the Church, that it is the property of a creature; but he says, it is the property of him who hath purchased it with his blood; and the conclusion is unavoidable that Christ is God.

To the Hebrews,* he writes, But to the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever. In this declaration, there are two circumstances to prove the divinity of Christ. He is called God; and it is said, he hath an eternal dominion.

St. John says, Hereby we perceive the love of God, because he laid down his life for us. Again, We trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those that believe.†

If we turn to the Old Testament, we shall find the term Lord (in the original, Jehovah) used, when it must be applied to Christ. If any title is peculiar to the self-existent God, it is Jehovah; and we have reason to be assured, that this is his incommunicable name. Isaiah, in a vision,‡ saw the Lord (Jehovah) sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. That it was Christ whom the Prophet saw, appears from John xii. 41. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.

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* Chap. i, 8. † 1 Tim. iv. 10. ‡ Chap. vi. 1.

It is no less manifest, that the Prophet Malachi foretold the coming of Christ, whom he calls Jehovah.† Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me : and the Lord, (Jehovah) whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in. It will appear exceedingly evident, that John was the messenger who was sent to prepare the way for Jehovah, from the words of Christ, recorded in Matthew xi. 10. This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. In the discourse, of which these words are a part, John was the subject.—John, it appears by the issue, was sent to prepare the way for Christ ; therefore Christ is Jehovah.

6. The divinity of Christ appears very evident from those passages of Scripture, in which it is said, that he is every where present. We cannot conceive, nor does it appear from Scripture, that a created being, though a pure spirit, can be in all places at the same time. We presume, it is the common faith of Christians, at this day, that Christ is in the midst of his worshipping assemblies. We presume, moreover, that it is now the chief consolation of many humble believers, that he is present with them, especially when they are assembled together in his name. The source of this consolation is found in a declaration which proceeded from his own lips ;* Where two or three are gather-

† Chap. iii. 1.

* Matt. xviii. 20.

ed together, in my name, there am I in the midst of them., Dr. Priestly has acknowledged, that this is a "passage which seems to suppose the omnipresence of Christ:"†

On this, Dr. Jamieson remarks,† "Thus it is granted, that the great Prophet, whom his people were to hear in all things, seemed, at least, to claim divine perfection. If this did not really belong to him, he must have been unfit for his office, since he did not abstain from all appearance of evil, of the greatest evil, the robbery of making himself equal with God. He could not therefore be a proper person to be heard in all things."

But the passage not only seems to suppose the omnipresence of Christ; it necessarily implies this divine perfection. He says, wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, he is there in the midst of them. His people may be assembled, in his name, at the same instant of time, in every part of the world. If, in these circumstances, he is in the midst of them, we must necessarily suppose him to be every where present.

We know, that the phrase, In the midst of them, was familiar to the Jews, as signifying God's special presence with his people; and also the protection and support which they received from him. God had said to their fathers, The Lord thy God walketh in the

† Familiar Illust. p. 26. † Vind. vol. i. p. 250.

midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee.*

From this very consideration, that God is in the midst of her, the Church assures herself, that God shall help her, and that right early.† This was her consolation in her greatest calamities; yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us; and we are called by thy name.‡ We observe here, that God promised to be in the midst of his people for a certain purpose, and that was to help them. Christ promised, that he would be in the midst of his praying people, where-ever they should assemble together in his name; and doubtless for the same purpose, to hear their prayers, and strengthen them by his grace; for his presence would be of no avail, if it were not to help them. When the Jews heard him speak the same language, which God had spoken to their fathers, and promise the same assistance which he had promised to them, and in the same way, they must understand him as declaring his omnipresence and equality with God.

Doubtless every faithful minister of Christ is encouraged and supported, in view of the immense work that is before him, by that promise, Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.§ But if the promise affords any real support, it implies, that Christ is with, and helps, his faithful ambassadors, where-ever they are, dispersed over the earth; and, of

* Deut. xxiii. 14. † Ps. xlv. 5. ‡ Jer. xiv. 9.

§ Matt. xxviii. 20.

course, it supposes his omnipresence. Let any one judge, if Christ is but a creature, now in Heaven, how he can, at the same instant of time, be with, and afford any effectual assistance to, all those faithful ministers, who are dispersed into every quarter of the globe.

7. The self-existence of Christ is plainly declared in the Bible. If this can be made to appear to the satisfaction of the reader, it must, though every other proof should fail, completely establish his supreme Deity. It would be absurd to say, this can be communicated to a creature, or that there is any sense in which a creature may be said to be self-existent.

When we consider how much the world was given to idolatry, before and at the time when Christ appeared, we should suppose that no titles which are peculiar to the self-existent Jehovah, would be given to a creature. This would be a necessary precaution ; for the application of such divine titles, would serve to cherish a propensity to idolatry, already too prevalent.

When God appeared to Moses in the bush, and gave him a commission to the Israelites, Moses inquired how he should answer that question, which they would naturally propose, What is his name ? Moses here evidently inquired for that name, which would express the nature of the divine existence, and designate the self-existent God from every creature. Accordingly he received an answer, embracing

that particular to which the question related : And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM : thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.* This name properly denotes the eternal, necessary, immutable, and incomprehensible existence of God. It denotes, that his is not a derived existence, and that things do not pass in succession ; but all times and events are present with him. We have already considered a passage of Scripture, in which Christ takes to himself this title, Where two or three are gathered together, in my name, there AM I. It is worthy of observation, that God spake of himself in the same language, in Isaiah xlviii. 16. I have not spoken in secret, from the beginning : from the time that it was, there am I. This passage has been produced, as implying the omnipresence of Christ ; but as he uses the very words, by which God made himself known to the people of Israel, they who heard him would naturally be led to conclude, that he intended to declare himself to be self-existent.

On other occasions, he speaks of himself in the same style. If any one will turn to the eighth chap. of John, he will find that Jesus, more than once, called himself I AM, in the course of one conversation. Verse 24, If ye believe not that I AM HE, ye shall die in your sins. The reader will observe, that the pronoun *he*, is a supplement by the translators.

* Ex. iii. 14.

When it is considered, that he had just before told them, verse 14, that they could not tell whence he came, it is very evident, that he calls himself I AM, in relation to his divine origin.—He could not have said with truth, ye cannot tell whence I came, if he had no higher origin than his birth of Mary ; for with this they were all well acquainted. The two passages, therefore, confirm each other, as proof that he intended to speak a language which would convey the idea of self-existence.

In verse 56, he told them their father Abraham rejoiced to see his day. Though the Jews understood him as declaring, by these words, his pre-existence ; yet if he had said no more, it might be alledged that he intended this only, that Abraham, by faith, saw and rejoiced in the prospect of the day of Christ, or the Gospel day.—But when they proposed the question, Hast thou seen Abraham ? he used a language which conveyed the idea, not of pre-existence only, but of an existence that is immutable and eternal : Before Abraham was, I am. And he confirmed the declaration by that emphasis which he used when he was about to advance some important truth : Verily, Verily, I say unto you.—It was not a perplexing question ; and it required but a plain answer. If Christ were no more than a man, there could be no difficulty in answering such an inquiry. In that case, he might, and doubtless would have said, Abraham saw my day no otherwise, than being

strong in faith, he had a joyful prospect of the Gospel times. If he intended to declare no more than an existence before his appearance in the flesh, the plain and most intelligible answer would be this, I was before Abraham. This would clearly convey the idea of pre-existence. But he used that language, which God had appropriated to himself; language which, it appears, God intended should convey the idea of existence without beginning, and without succession.

If Jesus had been only a creature, it is not probable he would have exposed himself to be stoned, when, by plainly informing his inquirers who and what he was, he might have avoided the danger.—When the Jews took up stones to stone him, it is manifest they considered him to be guilty of blasphemy, because he claimed self-existence. Accordingly, they were about to deal with him as the law, in such cases, directed.

Again, he says,* I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. That it is Christ who speaks, is evident from what follows, ver. 17 and 18: I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold I am alive forevermore.

It is said, the Scriptures are profitable for doctrine and instruction in righteousness. If so, they must be profitable to people of plain,

* Rev. i. 11.

common sense, and who have no other way to judge of truth, than by the obvious meaning of the language which is the medium of conveyance. When such people read these declarations, "I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last," as they conceive there can be no being before the first, they must understand him to mean that there was no being before him, and therefore he is self-existent. If no more is intended than that he was the first created being, either first in the order of time, or the first in dignity, certainly the expressions would be so qualified that they would convey this idea; that the Church might not be exposed to misapprehension on a subject of such moment.

If he were but a creature, the danger of misconceiving his character, from such declarations, is great, when we consider that this is the language of Jehovah,* Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, I am the First, and I am the Last; and besides me there is no God.

It is a singular circumstance, that the Jews should so frequently inquire of Jesus respecting his origin; and when he gave them an account of himself, that they should repeatedly accuse him of blasphemy, if he never had given them any intimation that he was equal, and one in essence, with the Father. It may be alledged, that as they sought occasion to heap reproach upon him, and to counteract the ef-

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• Isaiah xliv. 6.

fects of his preaching and works, they would naturally seize the most slight occasions to vilify him by such a charge; and while they were so intent to oppose him, they would, without any occasion, call him a blasphemer. This, however, will not account for the circumstance before stated. If Jesus were but a creature, and if he had never claimed any higher character, why should the charge of blasphemy fall exclusively on him? Why did not their fathers call the Prophets blasphemers? Or in later times, when the Apostles inculcated doctrines, equally offensive to the natural feelings of a carnal heart, with those which Jesus taught, why was not the same charge fixed upon them?—The truth is, Christ appeared to the senses of the Jews to be a man only. They, however, understood him as claiming a divine nature, which they, judging by appearances, supposed did not belong to him. On this they grounded their charge; and this is the only satisfactory way of accounting why they should repeatedly persecute him with this particular accusation.

SECTION II.

THE design of the Gospel and Epistles of St. John, appears to have been to confute the error of those who denied the divinity and atonement of Christ.

IT was observed, in the preceding Section, that the Evangelists did not generally write

with the spirit and style of men who were engaged in controversy. While they were recording the doctrines which their divine Master taught, and the works which he performed, they did not undertake to obviate objections, which, in ages after, would be raised. Indeed, they had no particular Heresy in view. This remark is applicable to the first three Evangelists; but St. John is an exception. The attentive reader will see, that he labors to establish certain doctrines, and to expose certain errors. It is exceedingly evident, that when he wrote, the seeds of Heresy were sown in the Church, and its pernicious influence began to spread abroad. This made it necessary for him to be more particular in stating the character of Christ, than those who had written before him, and also to establish believers in the faith of him as a propitiation for sin. His design in writing the first Epistle, is manifest, from his own words,* These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

The reason why he wrote with a view to expose and confute a particular Heresy, while the other Evangelists appear to have had no such particular design, will be obvious, if we advert to the time when he wrote. According to Dr. Owen, the Gospel of John was written about the year of our Lord sixty-nine. Dr. Lardner states, that his Epistles were written between the years eighty and ninety. Whether these dates are accurate or not, is not material; it is certain, that he wrote, by several years,

* 1 John ii. 26.

later than the other inspired writers. Sufficient time had elapsed, after the others had written, before he gave his testimony, for men of corrupt minds to pervert the doctrines of Scripture, and introduce Heresy into the Church. This circumstance is worthy of attention, because it proves the authenticity of those writings, by their coincidence with the known circumstances of the times when they were written; and it likewise shews us how the Apostles were disposed to treat Heresy which appeared in their day.

St. John lived long enough, to see Heresy arise in those Churches which the Apostles had planted; and to witness its pernicious effects. In his day, the divinity of Christ was denied. If he deemed this an essential article of the Christian dispensation, the reason, why he labored to establish this fundamental truth, is obvious. As he informs us, that he wrote concerning them that seduced the brethren, or to establish them in the faith, and guard them against the seduction of error; we are led to inquire, who were those seducers, and what were the particular errors which he combated? If we can ascertain this, it will enable us to see more clearly the direction and force of his reasoning. With respect to his design, we have the testimony of the primitive fathers.

Irenæus* was a disciple of Polycarp, who was himself a disciple of John. He wrote

* Those quotations from the fathers, which follow in this work, unless the Author is named, are principally taken from Dr. Jamieson's Vindication of the doctrine of the Trinity.

about the year of our Lord one hundred and seventy. He says, that John designed, by his Gospel, to remove the error which was sown among men by Cerinthus. Jerome, who lived about two hundred years later, testifies, that John, who had survived the other Apostles, was requested, by the Bishops of Asia, to write against the Heretics. His words are, "Last of all, at the request of the Bishops of Asia, he wrote his Gospel against Cerinthus, and other Heretics; and especially against the Ebionites, then beginning to appear, who say that Christ did not exist before Mary." Irenæus, who, as observed before, was but second from John, farther says, "John, declaring the one God Almighty, and the only begotten Christ Jesus, by whom all things were made, asserts, that this Person is the Son of God; that this is the only begotten; that this is the Maker of all things; that this is the true Light, who lighteth every man; that this is he who came to his own; that this very Person was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

The followers of Cerinthus, and the Ebionites, though there was some difference between them, both agreed in denying the Deity of Christ; therefore they were the Unitarians of that early period of Christianity.

Doctor Gregory has given a brief statement of the leading sentiments of the Ebionites; and also of Cerinthus, who was a distinguished character among those who were called Gnostics.*

“The Ebionites were a division of the Nazarenes. The name of Ebionites, according to Origin and Eusebius, is derived from Ebion, a poor and despicable man, from the mean opinion they entertained of Christ. Besides their adherence to the Jewish law, Theodoret ascribes to them other opinions. They contended, it is said, most strenuously, for the unity of the Godhead, in the Person of the Father, asserting that Jesus was a man, born after the common course of nature, of human parents, Joseph and Mary; but that the Holy Ghost descended upon him, at his baptism; and continued to actuate and inspire him, till his death.”

Of Cerinthus, the same writer observes,* that “he was one of the earliest and most distinguished seceders from the Church. He allowed, indeed, that the Creator of the world was the Lawgiver of the Jews; and a being endued, at first, with the greatest virtue; and asserted, that he derived his power from the Supreme God; and that he had, by degrees, fallen from his native dignity and virtue. In order to destroy his corrupted empire, the Supreme Being had commissioned one of his glorious Eons, whose name was Christ, to descend upon the earth; that he entered into the body of Jesus, which was crucified; but that Christ had not suffered, but ascended into Heaven.” However these differed in some respects; yet in one point, and that was a leading one, they were agreed, which was a denial of the Deity of Christ. Both denied the miraculous

* Page 59.

conception : and Irenæus, as quoted by Dr. Jamieson, asserts, that both denied the truth of our redemption. In these respects some modern Unitarians agree with both. These are allowed to be seceders from the Church; and history informs us, that these sects appeared while John was yet alive. By attending to his Gospel, and Epistles, we may see a particular design to expose and confute these Heresies.

It appears, that God had manifested himself to the Old Testament Saints, by his Word, or Wisdom. According to the testimony of Justin Martyr, and Philo the Jew, it was the received and common opinion of the Jewish Church, that this Word was not an attribute of God, but a distinct Person; for the latter, who must be supposed to know what was the opinion of the Jews, speaks of the Word, as a "second God."

It will appear, that they had reason to believe the Word was a Person, and not an attribute, when we consider some of the manifestations to the ancient saints. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh; for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh, by the Word of the Lord.* It is abundantly evident, that there was a personal appearance to Samuel; and further, that this manifestation was by the Word of the Lord. To go back to an earlier age, there was a person who appeared to Abraham, and was called the Word of the Lord;

* 1 Sam. iii. 21.

After these things, the Word of the Lord came in, or by, a vision, saying, Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield.† The reader will recollect, that the Father never appeared, in any form, to men. John says, No man hath seen God, at any time. But to Abraham there was a personal appearance; for it talked with him. The inspired writers, when rehearsing God's gracious covenant with his people, did not use such high personification, as to say of an attribute, that it appeared and talked.

The Word is expressly called that Jehovah who brought Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, verse 7. He enters into covenant with Abraham, verse 18; and Abraham calls him Jehovah.

Again, the Word of Jehovah is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.* According to the usual construction of sentences, the pronoun *he* refers to the Word.

St. John, evidently referring to these appearances, and to the ideas which the Jews had entertained respecting them, begins his Gospel, by describing the character and properties of this Word. They who oppose the doctrine of Christ's divinity, appear to have found the introduction to John's Gospel a very great difficulty. Sometimes they have denied the authenticity of so much as relates to the Word. At present, they evade the evidence resulting from this, by alledging that the Apostle does

† Gen. xv. 1.

* Psal. xviii. 30.

not describe a person, but an attribute : for they appear to be sensible, that if a proper person be the subject, such properties are ascribed to him, that he must be the true and eternal God. We have the testimony of Justin Martyr, and Philo, as already observed ; and likewise some of the Paraphrasts, that the Jews had understood this Word to be a person. By attending to John's description of the Word, we shall see, that he has in view a person ; and this person has the properties of the self-existent God : In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. It might be said of an attribute, that it was in the beginning with God ; but can we suppose, that the Apostle would, in this solemn and formal manner, undertake, and that in the commencement of his history of Jesus Christ, to inform the world of something, which all knew before, who knew any thing about the divine character ? If by the Word, he meant the wisdom of God, it was unnecessary to prove that this was with God ; for all who believe that God is infinitely wise, believe he was so at the beginning. What follows cannot, in any propriety of language, be said of an attribute,—“ And the Word was God.” If he were describing an attribute, it is still more improbable that he would repeat the assertion, “ The same was in the beginning with God.”

Verse 3, “ All things were made by him ; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” Words cannot make it more plain, that he, the Word, was the Creator of

all beings, and things that have been made. He is not mentioned as an instrument in the work of creation ; but the words naturally lead us to suppose he was the principal, or supreme Creator. If nothing was made, but by him, the conclusion is unavoidable, that he was not made, or created ; and therefore he is God over all.

Verse 4, It is said, " In him was life ; and the life was the light of men." If we suppose that an attribute, wisdom for instance, is here the subject of discourse, we shall meet with an insuperable difficulty. Shall we make the Apostle say, In wisdom was life ? This would be a refinement in personification, to which that plain Apostle was by no means accustomed. No, he evidently speaks of a person, and this person is the Source of life ; or life is in him, as its original fountain.

Mankind cannot become the property of any creature. The people of Israel, are however called the property of the Word, verse 11, " He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Can we join with those who say, not that a distinct person, but an attribute of God, is the subject of discourse ? If we do, we must admit that the Apostle used singular freedom with language, to say of an attribute, " He came unto his own." Mankind must be the property of some Being ; and that Being is God over all ; otherwise they are under obligations to a creature, which are inconsistent with that undivided love and universal service which God requires.

It belongs to God only to confer on mankind the power or right to become his sons ; but this, in verse 12, is ascribed to the Word, " But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name." It is evident, that the subject of discourse is not changed, therefore the pronoun *him*, *he*, and *his*, in the 12th verse, relate to the Word mentioned at the beginning of the discourse. " As many as received him, (the Word) to them gave he (the Word) power to become the sons of God ; even to them that believe in his (the Word's) name.

In the 14th verse, the Apostle speaks of the incarnation of the Word, and his manifestation to men : " And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." It may, with propriety, be read, And was among us, as in a tabernacle. Let us compare this with the 1st verse. There it is said, " The Word was God." Here the Apostle informs us, that the Word was made flesh, and dwelt as in a tabernacle, among men. Can we, according to the obvious import of language, impute any other meaning to the Apostle, than that God was manifested in the flesh, and tabernacled among men ? People of common sense, and who judge of language by its common use, will see that the inspired writer exhibits the divinity of Christ in various points of light, that he may not be misunderstood.

Heathen writers understood John as asserting the divinity of the Word; and this was one ground, which they occupied, in order to raise objections against Christianity. Julian, the apostate, says, "John Baptist testified concerning Jesus Christ, that it is he whom we should believe to be God the Word."

In the beginning of the first Epistle, which he informs us was written to confirm believers against seducers, he evidently refers to the same person who is described in the introduction of his Gospel. The language is similar: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." Here a person is doubtless described; for to see, to hear, to look upon, and to handle, must relate to a person as the object. This person is the Word of life. In the beginning of the Gospel, he calls this the Word; and says, In him was life. In the Epistle,* he speaks of the manifestation of this life, "For the life was manifested; and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested to us." What can he intend by this manifestation, except that a Being, who is the Source of life, appeared in a person that might be seen and felt? He could not mean life in the ordinary meaning of the term; or as it is in a creature; for he calls it eternal life. Unquestionably he means the same as in the begin-

* 1 John, i. 2.

ning of the Gospel, where he says, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

He calls those antichrists, who would seduce believers; and says, they separated themselves from the body of believers; and proved by this separation, that they did not belong to Christ. "Ye have heard that antichrist shall come. Even now are there many antichrists. They went out from us: but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not of us.* It is the opinion of Pool,† that this does not mean a change of place, but of doctrine. Therefore whatever might be the sentiments of these antichrists, it is evident they were essentially different from the doctrines which believers had received from the Apostles; for they had separated from the body of believers on the ground of doctrine.

The followers of Cerinthus, in the days of this Apostle, denied that Jesus was the Christ; or any thing more than a man, born after the common course of nature. Does not the Apostle point them out as antichrists, in these words, "Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?‡ The Ebionites also denied a Trinity of persons; or that Jesus was the Son of God in a higher sense than any man may be so called.—Does he not as pointedly condemn these, when he says, "He is anti-

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* Chap. ii. 18, 19. † Sinop. Crit. in loc. ‡ 1 John, ii. 22.

Christ who denieth the Father and the Son? for to deny them, as Father and Son, is to deny their distinct personality and relation to each other."

Both Gnostics and Ebionites, denied his pre-existence.—Does not the Apostle expose and condemn the doctrines of both, when he says, that the Word, in whom was life, or rather who is eternal life, was in the beginning with the Father?

From the testimony of Irenæus, we learn, that both Gnostics and Ebionites, denied the most essential truths respecting our redemption. This is a consequence which necessarily results from their opinions respecting the character of Christ.

It is evident, that the Apostle intended, in this Epistle, to establish believers in the faith of Christ, that they might have eternal life in him. Especially does he endeavor to impress the truth upon their minds, that they were purchased by him, from the dominion of sin.—He informs them, that the blood of Jesus Christ, his (God's) Son, cleanseth them from all sin; that he is the propitiation for their sin: and on account of the satisfaction which he has made, he acts in the capacity of an Advocate with the Father.

He declares the forgiveness of sins, for his name's sake; and exhibits the end for which God was manifested, even to take away sin;

and that he gave his life for us. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us."* Did God give his only begotten Son? The Apostle informs, that it was for the intent that we might live through him.

It appears, that he wrote to guard believers against the seductive arts of those who denied the most essential truths respecting our redemption, from the manner in which he sums up the Epistle. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life." The faith which he mentions, is not merely a belief of the testimony which Jesus had given; but a reliance upon him, personally considered, as a sure ground of confidence, for salvation. Their confidence of their own interest in this salvation, he assures them, would be strong in proportion to the strength of their faith in his name. He had shewed them before, that the Son of God was a competent Agent to accomplish their eternal salvation; and therefore a proper object of faith; which he would not be, if he were but a creature. He informs them, at the close, that their assurance and comfort would depend on a firm and steady reliance upon him, in the character of the Son of God, and Savior of the world. As he wrote to establish them against the influence of seducers, and that they might know that they had eternal life in the Son, it is a natural conclu-

sion that the sentiments of those seducers were calculated to destroy this confidence in Christ as a propitiation. If we attend to those errors which have been noticed, as prevailing in this Apostle's day, we shall see, that such was in fact their tendency. If they should give up their faith in Jesus as the true God and eternal life, their hope, and much more their assurance that they should inherit eternal life through him, would rest on a slender foundation. It will be difficult to conceive, that faith, in the name of a creature, let it be ever so strong, should give assurance of eternal life. That they might have this confidence of an interest in the divine favor, it was necessary that their minds should be established in the belief of Jesus, as the true God and eternal life.

CHAP. IV.

The Faith of Christians in the primitive times.

WE are now to consider the doctrines which the primitive Christians received from the Apostles. By such an appeal to the primitive faith, we would not have it supposed that we consider the Scriptures to be deficient, as to any article of faith, or rule of practice.

We receive the sacred Oracles as the only unerring guide ; and presume, that the men of this age are as competent to obtain a knowledge of the Scriptures, as Christians of early times. If it could be made to appear, that they generally denied the Deity of Christ, and rejected the doctrine of salvation by Grace, this should not weaken our faith in these doctrines, if to us they appear to constitute the scheme of Gospel truth. Some regard, however, is due to the opinions of those who lived nearest to the times of the Apostles ; and at a period, when Christians hazarded every thing, of a worldly nature, which is desirable, for the sake of the truth. The writer of this does not pretend to have had access to the original writings of the Apostolical fathers. He rests on the authority of others ; particularly Dr. Jamieson, who has, in his Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity, and of the Primitive Faith, taken copious extracts from the voluminous works of the fathers.

We need not look for that systematic arrangement of doctrine, in the writings of the primitive Christians, which we find in the more condensed works of modern divines. A spirit of unaffected piety appears in the fragments of their works which have been preserved. They wrote in a practical strain ; but in a loose and unconnected manner. We must therefore learn their views, in respect to particular doctrines, from detached and incidental remarks. At the time of which we are treating, the doctrines

of Christianity were not exhibited in the form of creeds and articles of faith. Opposition to generally received doctrines, makes it necessary for those who defend them to bring them into a system, and shew their relation to, and dependence on, each other.—It is observable, that it was not until opposition to the doctrines of Grace had assumed something of form and system, that they were arranged and exhibited in a connected view.

However loose and unconnected were the works of the fathers, it appears, that they were full in the belief of the Deity and atonement of Christ, and the doctrine of salvation by Grace, which is the basis of that scheme which is now called Calvinism.

Let us begin with the doctrine which Clemens, Bishop of Rome, professed. He is, by some, supposed to be the Clement whom St. Paul mentions, Philippians iv. 3. He says, "For Christ is their's who are humble, and not who exalt themselves over his flock. The sceptre of the majesty of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, came not in the shew of pride and arrogance; though he could have done so; but with humility, as the Holy Ghost had before spoken concerning him."* If that ancient father believed that Christ could have made his appearance, on earth, with external glory, he must have been fully persuaded of his pre-existence; for he could not have had a choice

* Jam. Vindica. Vol. 2. page 4.

Before he had a being. It is equally evident, that he believed him to be the self-existent God ; and that the coming, of which he speaks, was his manifestation in flesh : For it is not left to the choice of creatures, at their first formation, whether they shall appear with humility, or with a shew of glory. Again, he says, " Let us search into all the ages that have gone before us ; and let us learn, that our Lord has, in all of them, given place for repentance to all such as would turn to him.— Noah preached repentance ; and as many as hearkened to him were saved."* If Christ had, in all the preceding ages, given place for repentance, according to the belief of this writer ; both of these conclusions evidently follow, that he existed before his appearance in the flesh ; and that he is the sovereign Dispenser of life : for there can be no higher act of sovereignty, than to give repentance. The same writer farther says, " It becometh us to think of Christ as God."

Clemens taught the doctrine of special Grace, as the ground of justification, and final happiness ; that those who are saved, are first called in Christ Jesus, and justified through faith in him. " We who are called in Christ Jesus, are justified, not by our wisdom, understanding, piety, or works which we have wrought ; but by faith, by which Almighty God hath justified all from the beginning."

* Jam. Vindica. Vol. 2. page 8.

Polycarp was Bishop of Smyrna ; and he is supposed to have been a disciple of John.—He taught, that those who are saved, were chosen of God to salvation ; and he ascribed this election to Christ, as well as to God. He says, “ Bonds are the crowns of such as are truly chosen of God, and our Lord.” He asserts, that “ every living creature shall worship Christ.” In correspondence with this sentiment, he prayed for blessings from the Son as well as from the Father. “ Now the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he himself who is our everlasting High Priest, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, build you up in faith and truth, and grant to you a lot and portion among the saints.”

There is an Epistle which Polycarp wrote to the Philippians. In this he asserts the doctrine of salvation, by Grace only, through Christ ; “ Who (he says) submitted to go unto death itself, for our sins. It was for us that he underwent all things, that we might live through him.”—Again, of justification by Grace ; “ Into which joy many are exceedingly desirous to enter, knowing that ye are saved by Grace, not of works ; but by the will of God, through Jesus Christ.”*

Ignatius wrote an Epistle to the Ephesians, in which he declares the utter impotence of mankind ; and that every thing in saints which is spiritually good, is wrought in them by Christ. He has these words, “ Carnal men are not able to perform spiritual things : Ye do all things by Jesus Christ.”† He was Bish-

* Toplady, Vol. I. page 135. † Ibid.

op of Antioch, and lived about A. D. 40. In the same Epistle which is before mentioned, he warns the Church of the Ephesians, "to beware of Heresies; to believe, that Jesus Christ is God, who was incarnate; that he is impassible, as he is God; and passible, as he is man."*

Mr. Firmin, in the Preface to his "Réal Christian," has the following quotation from the Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians: "If any one say there is one God, and doth not confess Jesus Christ, but thinks the Lord to be a mere man, and not the only begotten God, the Wisdom and Word, but thinks he consists only of soul and body; he is a serpent and seducer, preaching an error for the perdition of men." The same writer produces the testimony of Justin Martyr, and says, that "he asserted the divinity of Christ in his apology; and also in his book against Trypho, the Jew; that Trypho replies, that Christ should be God, before the world began, and afterwards to be born, though not as other men, seemed to him not only a paradox, but foolish."

Clemens, Bishop of Alexandria, says, "He (the Word) is both God and man." In another place, speaking of God, the Word, he says, "They are both one, that is to say, one God.†"

Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, wrote against Heresies. According to Du Pin, "he dis-

* Du Pin. Vol. I. page 43. † Firmin.

courseth in many places, of the fall of the first man, and the lamentable consequences of his sin. He teacheth, that to repair the loss, and for the redemption of mankind, the Word was made man; and in many places of his works, and almost as often as he speaks of the Word, he establishes his divinity, eternity, and equality with the Father." This writer lived about the year of our Lord 178.

Barnabas, who is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, asserts the doctrine of regeneration by the effectual power of God alone. "When God hath renewed us, by the remission of sins, he hath formed us into a quite different likeness; so that we have a childlike mind, forasmuch as he himself fashions us anew. Behold, we have been formed afresh, as he, speaking by another Prophet, lo, saith the Lord, I will take away from them, that is from them whom the Spirit of the Lord foreviewed, I will take away from them their stoney hearts; and I will send fleshly hearts into them. We, who consider his commandments aright, speak as the Lord willeth us to speak: for that end he hath circumcised our ears and our hearts, that we might understand these things."*

Origin, in his book against Celsus, says, "Celsus thinks there is no other divinity in the human body, which Christ carried about, than in Homer's fictitious fables. We affirm, he doth consist of the human, together with the

* Toplady, Vol. I. page 121.

divine nature." In another passage against Celsus, he says, "In that we do sharply accuse the Jews, that they did not believe their own Prophets, who, in many places, did testify that he is God, God and Father of all." The book, which contains this testimony of Origen to the divinity of Christ, was written to defend the doctrines of the Church against Celsus, an infidel. In such circumstances, we must suppose he stated not merely his own opinion respecting this subject, but the opinion of the Christian Church in general.

Tertullian, in a book concerning the Trinity, and likewise against Praxeas, an Unitarian, clearly maintains, for truth, that Christ was God and man.

It is unnecessary to quote the writings of any, after the time of Justin Martyr; for it is admitted, even by Dr. Priestley, that from the time of Justin, about the year 100, to Athanasius, more than three hundred years after Christ, all the writers, whose works have come down to us, except one, were, what he calls, Platonizing Trinitarians. But though he acknowledges and laments the paucity of Unitarian writers, among primitive Christians, he consoles himself with the supposition, that though the Bishops were Trinitarians, a majority of the people were Unitarians. This supposition is rather unnatural in itself; and it wants proof. On the contrary, there is abundant evidence, that not the Bishops only, but the body of primitive Christians, were Trinitarians.

The sentiments expressed by the Church, at Smyrna, afford an indication of the doctrines of the Churches in general. This was one of those Churches which were planted by the Apostles. Upon the martyrdom of Polycarp, their Bishop, they wrote an Epistle to other Churches, informing them that the Jews suggested to the Roman Proconsul, and insisted that he should not give up the body of Polycarp to be buried, lest the Christians, leaving him who was crucified, should worship the other: "Not knowing," add they, "that we can never either forsake Christ, who suffered for the salvation of the whole world of them that are saved, or worship any other. For we worship him as being the Son of God. We love the martyrs, according to their desert, on account of their insuperable regard to their own King and Master."* It is evident, from this letter, that they worshipped Christ as a divine person; and that they believed his sufferings to be necessary, to procure salvation; and therefore their hopes rested alone on the efficacy of his atoning blood. They respected the memory of the martyrs, but did not worship them. They loved them, because these loved Christ, and laid down their lives for him.

The Jews and Pagans, to instigate the Roman Emperors against the Christians, brought this among other charges, that they paid divine honor to a crucified man. This affords, at

* Jam. Vin. Vol. II. page 444.

least, presumptive proof, that the primitive Christians were Trinitarians. But it is more than presumptive proof, when we consider that those who wrote apologies for the Christians, did not deny, but plainly declared, that they worshipped three Persons. If they believed that Christ was but a man, they would doubtless have considered the charge of worshipping him, as a reproach. They would have denied the charge in the gross, and appealed to their enemies to prove it; especially since by this method, they might roll away the reproach which lay upon them, and remove one cause of persecution.

Justin Martyr, in his second apology, does not deny that the Christians worshipped three Persons; but asserts, that this was the common faith, and had been so from the Apostles days. He says, also, that a belief of the Trinity was required of the most rude, and illiterate, in order to their receiving baptism, and admission into the Church.*

Melito, Bishop of Sardis, wrote an apology. He speaks in behalf of the Christians, "We are not worshippers of stones; but we are worshippers of one God, who is before all, and in all, in his Christ, who is truly God, the eternal Word." Athenagoras, in an apology, about the year of our Lord 177, refutes the charge of the Pagans in a similar manner with Justin: "Who is not filled with admiration, that we, who declare God the Father, and God the Son,

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* Jam. Vin. Vol. II. page 308, 309.

and the Holy Spirit, shewing both the power of their unity, and the distinction of their order, should be called perverse atheists? We are not atheists, who reckon as God, the Maker of the universe; and his Word, who proceedeth from him."*

As these professedly wrote apologies for the whole body of Christians, it was incumbent on them to give a true statement of the general belief. They were poor apologists, if they misrepresented the doctrines of the Church; and they exposed themselves to lasting infamy. The point which they labored to prove was, that Jesus, whom the Churches worshipped, was the eternal Word, equal with the Father.

Celsus, an infidel philosopher, produced the same common objection against the Christian worship. He says, the Christians worshipped Jesus, whom he impiously calls "a mere upstart." Origin wrote against him about the year of our Lord 230. He grants, that Christians worshipped Jesus, whom he calls the propitiation for our sins; but denies that they worshipped a man, or one of the ministers of God. After declaring our Savior's unity of essence with the Father, he adds, "Therefore we worship one God, the Father and the Son."

The testimony of heathen writers goes to prove, that the primitive Christians were Tri-

† Jam. Vin. Vol. II. p 453.

nitarians. The observation in the letters of Pliny to the Emperor Trajan, respecting the Christian worship, is well known. Pliny requests the Emperor to direct him how to proceed with the Christians, when their enemies should accuse them. He says, "They," that is, the enemies of the Christians, "affirmed, that this was the amount of their crime, or error, that they were wont to assemble, on a certain day, before it was light; and to sing an alternate hymn to Christ, as God." Was this then the crime of the Christians, in the estimation of their enemies, that they worshipped Christ, as God? How easily might they have avoided trouble, by obviating the charge, if it were false?

Hierocles, another heathen, in an abridgement of the life of Apollonius Tyanæus, compares the gravity of the heathen, with the levity of the Christians. "We do not," says he, "account the person," that is, Apollonius, "who has performed such actions, a God; but a man favored by the gods: but they, because of a few miracles, proclaim Jesus to be a God."

Lucian testifies to the general belief of Christians in the divinity of Christ.

Other heathen writers might be named, who understood of the Christians that they believed in the Deity of Christ. This was one of the charges which their enemies repeatedly laid against them; and the truth of this pre-

tended accusation was admitted by those who wrote apologies, though they did not admit it in the sense of their enemies, which was, that they worshipped a crucified man.

Irenæus wrote about the year of our Lord 180. He exhibited a creed which embraced the general belief of Christians in that age.* He says, "The Church, which is dispersed through the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the Apostles, and their immediate successors, the belief in one God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of the Heaven, the earth, and the sea, and in one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, made flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Ghost, who, by the Prophets, revealed the dispensation, ~~and the~~ coming of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ, his birth by a virgin, his passion, his resurrection, his ascension into Heaven in the flesh, and his advent from Heaven in the glory of his Father, to the gathering together of all things, and the raising up of the flesh of all mankind. That to Christ Jesus our Lord, and God and Savior and King, according to the good pleasure of the invisible Father, every knee shall bow, of things in Heaven, of things on earth, and of things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess; and in all things he will execute righteous judgment: both the evil spirits, and the angels who sinned and became apostates, and the impious, the unjust, the breakers of the law, and the blasphemers among men, he will send into ever-

* Dr. Gregory's Christian Church, Vol L. page 83, 84.

lasting fire : but to the just and holy, and to those who keep his commandments, and remain in his love, whether from the beginning or whether they have repented of their sins, he will give life and glory forever." In this we have the testimony of one of the most respectable primitive writers, that the Church throughout the world, received from the Apostles, the doctrine of three Persons in the Godhead, of a future judgment, and state of rewards and punishments, the necessity of repentance ; and that life and glory are the gift of Christ.

As it respects the doctrine of the primitive Christians, the testimony of Du Pin may be admitted with safety. He had studied the writings of the fathers with critical attention ; and it is presumed his integrity, as a historian, entitles him to confidence. In his summary of the doctrines of the Church, during the three first centuries, he says, " They acknowledged a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, the eternity of the Word, and the Holy Ghost. They maintained, that the Word was, from all eternity, in God, as a Person distinct from the Father ; that he made himself man, to save the world which was lost by the sin of the first man." He further adds, " all the fathers, of whom we have spoken, make profession of this faith ; and assure us, that this is the doctrine which all the Churches in the world have received from the Apostles ; and that it was necessary to believe it, in order to become a Christian."

Although, in these detached quotations, the reader will not find a connected system of doctrine; yet he will discern something, in each of the writers named, which necessarily belongs to a scheme of Grace; and in the whole, viewed collectively, he will see the substance of that system of doctrine which is called Calvinism. There is evidence, as conclusive as the case will admit, that the primitive Christians were Trinitarians. They believed in the ruin of all mankind, by the sin of the first man; and that the Son of God became incarnate, to deliver sinners from the deplorable effects of the fall. It appears equally evident, that the necessity of divine influence, to renew holiness in men, was an article of their belief. A natural reason may be given, why those writers, who lived nearest to the times of the Apostles, did not investigate and insist on particular doctrines with as great earnestness as some who lived later. Though there were some who dissented from the general belief, yet the opposition was not so great as to excite controversy, or any considerable agitation in the public mind. A strong opposition excites controversy. It will, of course, lead to a more critical investigation of doctrines. Men are led to embody opinions, when they feel the pressure of opposition; and to shew the dependence of one doctrine on another. The loose and unconnected manner in which the primitive Christians delivered their sentiments, affords a natural proof that they wrote at a time when there was no effectual opposition to the doctrines which had been generally received.

ed. If Christians were now of one mind, they would be less guarded and precise in the exhibition of their opinions. In this respect, they would, in some measure, write in the manner of the primitive authors. They would not so strongly insist on doctrines, if there were few or none who denied them. As opposition appeared, and gathered strength, we shall see that the friends of Evangelical truth rose in its vindication; and they took very decisive measures to combat a Heresy which they deemed to be dangerous.

CHAP. V.

The conduct of the primitive Christians, towards those persons, who denied the divinity and the atonement of Jesus Christ.

IF no satisfactory evidence could be produced from the writings of the primitive Christians, to prove that they were Trinitarians; yet if it can be made to appear, that when the Unitarian doctrine was divulged, they, in the most pointed terms, disapproved of it, no reasonable ground for doubt is left, that the doctrine of the Trinity was the doctrine of the primitive ages. There is a max-

im, founded on experience, that the actions of men speak louder than their words. Their conduct is a more certain indication of their real sentiments, than any professions which they make.

If there be proof, that when the Unitarian doctrine made its first appearance in the Gentile Church, it excited alarm ; and if those, who first divulged this sentiment, were cut off from the fellowship of the Churches ; these facts will prove, that the sentiment was new, and that those who then adopted it, were considered as having forfeited the character of Christians. For it is manifest injustice to deprive men of the privileges of Christians, who have not forfeited the character. If the Deity of Jesus Christ be a doctrine, of Scripture, it is an essential doctrine ; and those who deny this, pervert the whole system of Christianity. They advance a scheme of doctrine, which effects a material change in the construction of religious worship, and in all those doctrines which are the object of faith. It might be expected, that those who believe the importance of sentiments to the practice of Christian duties, would draw a wide distinction between those who received and those who rejected the doctrine of Three Persons in one God. There is evidence,

1. That the Churches, in the earliest ages of Christianity, considered those as Heretics who denied the Deity and atonement of Christ.

2. That they separated such from their communion.

The Ebionites, and those who adopted the opinions of Cerinthus, were the Unitarians of primitive times. They denied the Deity of Jesus Christ, and those doctrines which result from a perfect atonement. If we can ascertain the opinions which the Christians of that age entertained respecting these, it will be direct to our purpose. They were not, strictly speaking, seceders from the Church; for it is doubtful, whether the body of believers admitted their claim to the character of Christians. They were Jews, who pretended to receive the Christian dispensation; but they mingled the ceremonial law with the precepts of the Gospel, and denied that Jesus had any other than a human nature. Jerome seems to exclude them from the body of Christians, and to consider them as Jews. He says, "Why do I speak of the Ebionites, who only pretend that they are Christians." His language implies, that he did not admit their pretensions.

To establish the proposition which we have stated, the detached opinions of individuals will not be deemed sufficient. By a recurrence to the testimonies of those who gave an account of the Heresies which appeared in the early ages, we shall, with greater certainty, learn the opinions of the Church in general.

When a historian enumerates the Heresies of any particular age, he does not rest his account on his own separate opinion. As a historian, he exhibits the general sentiment of the Church; and calls that doctrine a Here-

sy, which the Church, in his communion, deems to be such.

Irenæus wrote a treatise concerning Heresies. He includes the Ebionites with the Gnostics and Nicolaitans, who are mentioned Rev. ii. 6. Of the Ebionites, he says, "God will judge them. How can they be saved, if it be not God who worketh out their salvation upon earth." Again, "Those who affirm, that he (Christ) is a man only, begotten of Joseph, persisting in the bondage of their original disobedience, perish, not embracing the Word of God the Father, nor receiving liberty from the Son; as himself says, If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. But being ignorant of him, who, of a virgin, is Immanuel, they are deprived of his gift, which is eternal life. But not receiving the Word of incorruption, (or the incorruptible Word) they continue in mortal flesh, are debtors to death, rejecting the antidote of life."*

If this writer be considered as exhibiting the faith of the Church in his time, (and as a historian this is the light in which we are to view his statement) we learn, that those were reputed Heretics, who denied the divinity of the Savior. But this is not all. We learn also, that the primitive Christians considered mankind to be dead in sin "in the bondage of disobedience;" and that those who continue in this state of ruin, and reject the Savior

* Jam. Vind. vol. II. page 212.

as the true God, must suffer everlasting death. This writer evidently considers an atonement to be a necessary prerequisite for salvation; and this atonement must be wrought by a divine Person. The question which he raises can admit no other sense. "How can they be saved, if it be not God who worketh out their salvation upon earth?" Here salvation is called the gift of God, and therefore it is of free Grace.

Tertullian, Bishop of Carthage, about the year 200, wrote concerning Heresies. With the Sadducees, Gnostics, and Nicolaitans, he includes the Ebionites in the group of Heretics. In one of his treatises,* he fills a whole chapter with a description of this Heresy. In another place, he speaks of Ebion as one of the antichrists, to whom the Apostle John refers, because he did not think that Jesus was the Son of God.† Again, he expressly calls that doctrine a Heresy which excludes a Trinity; and supposes it to be one of the devices of satan, to destroy the efficacy of the Gospel. He says, "The devil hath variously contended against the truth. He hath endeavored sometimes, by defending, to destroy it. He maintains one Lord Almighty Creator of the world, that even of this one, he may make Heresy."‡

Tertullian is not alone in the opinion, that under a pretext of zeal for the unity of God,

* De carni Christi. † Jam. Vind. vol. II. page 224.

‡ Ibid. page 227.

satan excites men to propagate doctrines which destroy the salutary effects of Christianity. He is more sure of success, when he conceals his attack under this cover, than he is when he instigates men to open infidelity and atheism.

Origin wrote about the year 230. Celsus, the Epicurian philosopher, brought as an objection against Christianity, the diversity among those who bore the Christian name. Origin, after mentioning the Valentinians, and Gnostics, and declaring that they had never been Christians, adds, "Be it so, that others also, who receive Jesus, and therefore boast that they are Christians, but yet retaining the law, and choosing to live like the multitude of the Jews, (as the Ebionites of both kinds) *how can this crime affect those who constitute the Church?*" §—From the last clause of this quotation, the conclusion is unavoidable, that tho' the Ebionites pretended to be Christians, their claim to this character was not admitted; for in the opinion of believers in general, they were not of the Church.

Eusebius wrote a history of the Church down to his time, anno 320. As an Ecclesiastical historian, it was incumbent on him to exhibit a correct statement of the general belief. He mentions two classes of Ebionites, one of which did not, at first, go into all the excesses of the other; but were afterwards drawn away by them. He speaks of them as being under the influence of a malignant demon. "Others,

whom a malignant demon was not able entirely to turn aside from the love of Christ, finding them weak, in some respects, he reduced into his power. These, by the ancients, were called Ebionites, as thinking meanly concerning Christ: For they reckon him a mere man, like other men; but approved of God, on account of his virtue, being the son of Mary's husband. Others, called by the same name, leaving the absurd opinion of the former, do not deny that Christ was born of a virgin; but say, that he was of the Holy Ghost. However, at the same time, they, by no means, allowing that Christ was God, the Word, and Wisdom, were drawn into the rest of their impiety.* We do not approve of the harsh language of this writer. But his testimony goes to prove, that there were two kinds of Ebionites; that those, who denied the divinity and miraculous conception of the Savior, were under the influence of a malignant demon, and that their doctrines were impious; that others admitted the miraculous conception, yet not being established in the truth, they were drawn into the impiety of the former. It is not probable this writer would hazard his reputation, as a historian, by calling that a Heresy which was not considered so, at least by the communion to which he belonged.

The testimony which has been produced makes it evident, that a majority of the primitive Christians were believers in the divinity

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* Jam. Vin. Vol. II. page 72.

of the Savior, and of justification through the merit of his atonement; and they considered as Heretics, persons who rejected these essential truths.

2. It appears that they separated such from their communion.

In the Gentile Church, Unitarians, of different sects, arose in the second century. The followers of Theodotus asserted the simple humanity of Jesus Christ. The followers of Praxeas contended, that there was such an union between God and Christ, that God the Father suffered. On this account they were called Patripassians.* There were others who were called Paulianists, from Paul of Samosata. This Heresiarch asserted the simple humanity of Christ, but maintained that the wisdom, or spirit, of the Father, descended upon him, dwelt within him, and empowered him to work miracles and instruct mankind.† These leaders were excommunicated; and those, who perseveringly adhered to their sentiments, were treated as excommunicated persons.

Theodotus appears to have been the first, among the Gentiles, who denied the divinity of Christ; therefore his error is, by Eusebius, called an apostacy. In his Ecclesiastical history, he calls Theodotus "the leader and parent of this God-denying apostacy." An

* Gregory, Vol. I. page 102. † Ibid, Vol. I. page 135.

apostacy is a departure from the faith of the Church. When the historian speaks of the errors of the Ebionites, he does not use the term *apostacy*, for a reason which has been already given. They were not considered as belonging to the Church.—Theodotus belonged to the Church; but he apostatized from the faith, and became an Unitarian.

In the time of Eusebius, anno 320, there were certain Unitarians who claimed that theirs was the common faith, until the time of Victor, the thirteenth Bishop of Rome from St. Peter. This historian repels the insinuation, in the most direct terms, by declaring, that Theodotus was the first who advanced the Unitarian doctrine; and that he was excommunicated by Victor. He says, “How are they not ashamed to frame such falsehoods concerning Victor, when they certainly know that Victor excommunicated Theodotus the currier, the chief and parent of this God-denying apostacy, being the first that called Christ a mere man?”* He means, the first among the Gentiles. He mentions his excommunication by the Roman Bishop, as proof of this; and it affords strong proof that he was the first in this error: for if the Unitarian had been the common faith to the time of Victor, it is by no means probable that this Bishop would have even dared to excommunicate Theodotus, on account of such opinions.

Tertullian says, “Theodotus, after being apprehended, by the civil power, for the name

* Eccles. Hist. B. v. Chap. 25.

of Christ, did not cease to deny and blaspheme him ; for he *introduced* that doctrine ; according to which he asserted, that Christ was merely a man, and denied that he was God."†

Epiphanius likewise speaks of him as the first among the Gentile Christians in this Heresy. Theodoret confirms what we find in Eusebius. He says, "The most blessed Victor, Bishop of the Romans, excommunicated Theodotus, because he attempted to adulterate the decrees of the Church."‡

The excommunication of this man is a fact, which has the weight of a thousand arguments, to prove, that when first the Unitarian doctrine appeared, it excited alarm and abhorrence in the Church. It was deemed a Heresy of that dangerous tendency, as to exclude those who embraced it from the privileges of Christians.

A modern Unitarian, of great learning, considered it as a proof that the Unitarian was the common belief, when he finds that the most early writers have said but little about it.* But if it did not appear among those who were considered as of the Church until the time of Victor, it is easy to find a cause for the silence of early writers. We need not expect to hear mankind say much about that which has no actual existence. It is true, this

† Jam. Vin. Vol. II. page 393.

‡ Page 400.

* Dr. Priestley.

was the sentiment of the Ebionites, and in them it was condemned by early writers ; yet as their pretension to the name of Christians was not admitted, it is not to be expected that it would so deeply engage the attention of the primitive divines, as when it appeared in the Church.

The name of Praxeas has been mentioned, and his followers, who were called Patripassians, because they asserted that God the Father suffered. These were Unitarians of another stamp. According to Tertullian, this man, as the leader of a Heresy, was excommunicated by Zepherinus, who succeeded Victor in the see of Rome.† Both he, and Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, declare, that the followers of Praxeas, and all Unitarians, should renounce their errors, and be re-baptized, before they could be received into the Church. It was decreed, in a council of African Bishops, that all Heretics should be re-baptized.

Paul, of Samosata, was one of the higher order of Bishops. He presided over the Metropolitan Church of Antioch. He affected, in his appearance, the splendor of a monarch. In his manners, there was a levity which little became his profession as an Ecclesiastic, yet calculated to attach the unprincipled and immoral to his person and doctrine. With great arrogance, he taught the simple humanity of Christ.

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† Jam. Vind. Vol. II. page 281.

Dr. Gregory says, "Several councils of Bishops were convened on occasion of this Heresy; and by their decrees, Paul was degraded from the Episcopal dignity."*

By the testimony of Eusebius, it appears, that the first council, which was assembled on this occasion, could not convict him of the Heresy laid to his charge, on account of his duplicity. But afterwards, when he appeared more open, a council was assembled, which consisted of seventy or eighty Bishops. Eusebius says also, "And the leader of the Heresy at Antioch was discovered, and by all manifestly convicted of another doctrine than that which is preached by the whole Catholic Church under Heaven."† No mention is made of any errors, for which he was deposed, except that of denying the divinity of Christ.—Eusebius gives this reason why the council that degraded him was called: "Because it was universally reported of Paul, that he had departed from the truth."

Thus the three principal leaders of the Unitarian doctrine, in the second and third centuries, were excommunicated. But were those of the laity, who adhered to their doctrine, also cast out of the Church? We cannot say they were formally excommunicated; but it is evident, that they were treated as persons who had forfeited the character of Christians. We have seen, that it was decreed in a council of

* Christian Church, vol. I, page 136.

† Jam. Vind. vol. II, page 417.

African Bishops, that all Heretics should renounce their errors, and be re-baptized, before they could enjoy the privileges of the Church. We have direct testimony, that this was required of the followers of Paul. In one of the canons of the council of Nice, it was ordained, that the Paulianists (so the followers of Paul were denominated) who returned to the Catholic Church, should, without exception, be re-baptized. It appears, that this canon included laymen, as well as others, from the following clause: "If any of them have, in time past, been of the number of the clergy; if they shall appear to have been free from blame, i. e. as to their moral character, being re-baptized, let them be ordained by a Bishop of the Catholic Church."*

If the Churches deemed it necessary that such, on a renunciation of their errors, should be re-baptized, they were undoubtedly considered as having forfeited the privileges of Church members, and treated as excommunicated persons.

From this short survey, it certainly appears, that the primitive Christians were alarmed at the appearance of the Unitarian doctrine, and they took very decisive measures to arrest its progress, as an evil of most pernicious tendency. The part which they acted, proves the utter abhorrence with which they contemplated a sentiment, which affects the whole system of Christianity.

* Jam. Vind. vol. II, page 416.

CHAP. VI.

Of the Arian doctrine.

IN the primitive ages of the Church, as in modern times, there were a variety of names, and some circumstantial differences; but the most material to our present inquiries, and indeed those into which all other sects may, with some small variation, be resolved, were the Unitarians, which have been already considered, the Arians, and the Pelagians. These were prominent sects, which, among the ancients, dissented from the orthodox. Other names there were, yet they were but different modifications of these three denominations. It will be made to appear, in the progress of this Treatise, that among the moderns, those who reject the doctrine of salvation by Grace, come within one of these descriptions.

Let us first inquire into the origin and nature of the Arian scheme: and secondly, how it was considered and treated at the time of its first appearance.

1. The Arian doctrine received its name from Arius, a Presbyter of Alexandria. He

divulged the sentiment about the year of our Lord 300. It is said, that Alexander, the Bishop of that city, in a discourse upon the Trinity, in the presence of his Presbyters, said, that there was an unity in Trinity. Arius, one of his Presbyters, replied, that such language savored of Sabellianism; and likewise, that if the Father begot the Son, there must have been a beginning of the Son's existence, and consequently a time when he was not. This account Dr. Priestley has quoted from Socrates.

Be this as it may, it is agreed, by Ecclesiastical writers, that Arius and his followers propagated, for substance, the following sentiments: That the Son was totally and essentially distinct from the Father; that he was the first and noblest of those beings, whom God the Father had created out of nothing; that he was a dependent being, created by the will of the Father, the instrument by whose subordinate operation the Almighty Father formed the universe, and therefore inferior to the Father both in nature and in dignity.

Those arguments which support the divinity of Christ, in opposition to the Socinian scheme, will have equal weight against the followers of Arius. There is indeed no essential difference in the consequences which result from them. Dr. Mosheim says, that the opinion of Arius, concerning the Son of God, was connected with other sentiments which were very different from those commonly received among Christians; though, he adds,

“none of the earliest writers have given us a complete and coherent system of those tenets which were really held by him, and his followers.” We are left to conjecture what those sentiments were; and from their ideas respecting the character of Christ, we may suppose they denied the atonement in the sense which makes salvation the effect of free Grace.

If he, who was manifested for our salvation, were God, as well as man, he was, in all respects, competent to perform this great work. Being above the law, as it respects the divine nature, and becoming voluntarily subject to the law, he was qualified to make satisfaction for others; and therefore, in this character, he is a proper object of faith. If he were not God, as well as man, it is of small consequence whether he were a man, or an angel, or the highest created being. As to his competency to make atonement, the difference cannot be essential. If a man be in duty bound to love and serve God to the extent of his powers, so also is an angel, or a creature above angels. It will make no difference, that the latter has greater powers than the former; for as they are derived, he owes the exercise of them to him who furnished him with such capacities. If a creature have done no more than his personal duty, when he has loved God with all the heart, and served him with all his ability, it is evident, that he has made no atonement for other creatures.

Between the Creator, and a creature, the distance is immense and inconceivable; but

among creatures, there is a difference only in degree. They all stand in a similar relation to the Creator, as dependent and accountable beings ; and all have duties to the extent of the ability given them ; and therefore the discharge of these duties is inconsistent with the idea of their paying a ransom for others. We may, from these considerations, conclude, that the sentiments of the Arians, which differed from other Christians, and which the historian has not specified, were at least a virtual denial of those doctrines of Grace, which result from a perfect atonement. Their sentiments respecting the character of Christ, would naturally lead them to such conclusions.

Let us here make a pause, and inquire, whether this scheme, when carried into its consequences, (consequences which naturally follow their opinions of the Savior) be calculated to beget that humility which results from a deep sense of sin, and entire dependence on the mercy of God for pardon and life ? Must not those, who adopt this doctrine, either believe that they are not sinners, or if they are, must they not relinquish forever the hope of seeing life ? Both these consequences are equally unfavorable to the practice of virtue. In one case, they are exposed to become a prey to pride and self-sufficiency ; and in the other, to absolute despair : and neither pride nor despair have a tendency to promote purity of life.

Can an Arian, on his own scheme, feel that lively gratitude, or effectual inducement to

holy obedience, with him who hopes that he has been delivered from the condition of a child of wrath, and an heir of misery, and restored to the divine favor through the kind interposition and meritorious satisfaction of the Son of God? He may talk of the beauty and excellence of virtue: yet he cannot recommend it effectually to others: for he takes away its most powerful enforcements.—We are to consider,

2. How the Arian scheme was viewed and treated, at the time when it first appeared.

At the first view of the history of those times, some might suppose there was a certain period when Arians had become more numerous than the orthodox. But there is no evidence of this; or that they were ever nearly equal in number. It is true there was a time when the civil power was on their side. This gave to them a temporary importance; and under such powerful protection, they threw many embarrassments in the way of those who adhered to the orthodox creed. But that importance, to which they rose, was of short duration. It was no longer than the time in which they were upheld by the arm of imperial authority.

When the doctrines of Arius were first published, it appears evident, that they excited a general abhorrence in the Church. Some men of learning and of genius, however, became attached to his opinions. Two coun-

cils, it appears, were assembled at Alexandria, in consequence of these new opinions. In these, Arius was accused of impiety, and expelled from the communion of the Church. This did not bring the dispute to a termination. Arius retired into Palestine, from whence he wrote letters, and caused much disturbance to the Church.

At length the Emperor Constantine summoned the council of Nice. This was the most celebrated council that has ever been convened; and it was the most general. It is said, that three hundred and eighteen Bishops complied with the Imperial summons, and attended this famous council: and the whole number of attending Ecclesiastics has been computed at two thousand and forty-eight persons.* These were assembled from all parts of the Christian world; and therefore the history of this assembly, and the decrees which were then passed, represent the belief of the Church, at that time, respecting the doctrine of the Trinity.

The council was called on account of the opinions of Arius. The Emperor appeared in person, and declared that the object was to settle the disputes which had arisen in the Church. Dr. Priestley, in his history of the Church, admits that the opinions of Arius were the chief subject for which this council was convened.

* Gregory's Christian Church, Vol. I. page 170.

The opinions of Arius were condemned, almost unanimously ; and Jesus Christ was declared to be of the same essence with the Father. The following is translated from the Nicene creed, as it stands in the Epistle of Eusebius to the Cæsarians, and that of Athanasius to Jovian.

“ We believe in one God, the Father, Almighty ; in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten, begotten of the Father, that is, of the same substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made consubstantial with the Father, by whom all things were made, things in Heaven, and things on earth, who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate, and became man, suffered and rose again the third day, and ascended into Heaven, and comes to judge the quick and the dead ; and in the Holy Ghost.

“ And the Catholic and Apostolic Church doth anathematise those persons, who say that there was a time when he, the Son of God, was not ; that he was not before he was born ; that he was made of another substance ; or that he is created, or changeable, or convertible.”

Dr. Gregory informs us, that this faith was accepted by all the members of the Synod, except one, Eusebius of Cæsaria, who yielded a reluctant and ambiguous compliance. The

Bishops also in general cheerfully submitted to the decrees of this council. The most eminent of its opposers was Eusebius of Nicomedia, who, after three months of wavering, was exiled, and disgraced.*

Though the decrees of the council of Nice were peremptory and decisive, they did not wholly suppress the Arian Heresy; nor heal the divisions which it excited in the Church. This might be reasonably expected; for when human power is exerted to impose a scheme of faith on men who depart from the general belief, it tends rather to widen than to heal the breach. They may be put to silence; but in matters of faith, they will not yield to a compulsive power. Persecution tends to confirm them in their opinions, even though erroneous.

By an artifice that was practised on the Emperor Constantine, he was induced to recall Arius from banishment; and when the Bishops of Africa persisted in refusing to receive him, the Emperor invited him to Constantinople; and ordered the Bishop to admit him to his communion. Some of the successors of Constantine declared in favor of the Arians. This gave them a temporary triumph; and a scene of contention followed, for many years.

It is not necessary to the present object, to give a detail of the fluctuation of opinion, as the civil authority either favored, or opposed,

* Christian Church, Vol. I. page 171.

the orthodox ; and that hostility and mutual recrimination which distracted the Church, after the death of Constantine. It appears, however, that the orthodox faith prevailed, after a season of confusion ; and, in the fifth century, the Arians sought a refuge among the Goths, Suevi, Vandals, and Burgundians, those barbarous nations who now began to advance, and commit depredations upon the western empire. These rude people adopted the Arian scheme ; and as they gained, in conquest, upon the empire, they gave support and importance to the sect. This importance was of short duration : for in the next century, according to Mosheim, most of those northern nations embraced the orthodox faith. The same writer adds, “ Whether the change, wrought in those princes, was owing to the force of reason and argument, or the influence of hopes and fears, is a question which we shall not pretend to determine. One thing, however, is certain, and that is, from this period the Arian sect declined apace ; and could never after recover any considerable degree of stability and consistence.”

These facts are not exhibited as claiming any authority like Scripture ; for had the whole Christian world, in the time of Constantine, declared against the doctrine of the Trinity, and all that scheme of Grace which results from a perfect atonement, this should not weaken our faith in those doctrines if we find them in the Gospel. By this exhibition of facts respecting the rise of the Arian scheme,

the friends of evangelical truth will see, that in addition to their own convictions of truth, they have the example of primitive times. Here the orthodox believer will see, that while Heresy has ever been in a state of fluctuation, the voice of a majority, in the purest times, from the Apostles days, has been in favor of the doctrines of Grace, until the Church became corrupted by an unnatural alliance with the civil authority..

When the Arian doctrine first appeared, it is manifest that it excited a deep concern in the minds of Christians. Their conduct, in regard to this doctrine, is a proof that they at least deemed it a Heresy of pernicious tendency; and that if it were suffered to spread, it would corrupt the Church, and counteract the moral tendency of the Gospel. On no other principle can we justify, or even account for, the part which they acted. This proof does not arise from those contentions between the Arians and the orthodox, which agitated the Church after the death of Constantine. These became conflicts between the rival Emperors, rather than between truth and error. The proof arises from the decision of the Bishops and Ecclesiastics, who were assembled at the council of Nice. That council was the most general assembly of Ecclesiastics that had ever been convened. They doubtless considered themselves as the representatives, and their decisions as the voice, of the Christian world.

We may, with propriety, consider the result of their deliberations as an expression of the general opinion.

Those who have thought favorably of the Arian scheme of doctrine, acknowledge, that the principal object of this council was to decide respecting the doctrines of Arius, which were then new.

It is a fact, that these doctrines were condemned; and that Arius, with those who adhered to him, were excommunicated.

It appears furthermore, that the members of that numerous assembly were almost unanimous in the sentence upon Arius and his followers. The conclusion, that they considered this doctrine to be a Heresy, is plain and unavoidable.

The fathers, who composed that council, declare their belief, that the Son of God, who is equal, or consubstantial, with the Father, came down, became incarnate, and suffered for our salvation. In addition to their belief in the Deity of Jesus Christ, they also declare it as their belief, that his sufferings were necessary for salvation; or that men are saved by the efficacy of his atonement; therefore they are saved by Grace.

Their conduct, respecting Arius, is manifest proof, that they considered his doctrine to be essentially different from that which they express in their creed.

CHAP. VII.

Of the Pelagian doctrine.

THE Church had not yet enjoyed a respite, from those contentions which the doctrines of the Arians had excited, when another sect arose, which has divided the Christian world from the fifth century to this time. If credit be due to the testimony of Mosheim, doctrines were advanced in the fifth century, which, at that time, were new, and different from those which had been the faith of the Church. Pelagius, and Cælestus, two monks, the former of Britain, and the other of Ireland, first originated those sentiments. The followers of these, have been called Pelagians.

We must suppose, that a historian of such credibility as Mosheim, would not hazard assertions on slight grounds; and therefore we may depend upon the correctness of the account which he has given of this sect. His account is this: "These monks looked upon the doctrines which were commonly received concerning the original corruption of human nature, and the necessity of divine grace to enlighten the understanding and purify the heart, as

prejudicial to the progress of holiness and virtue, and tending to lull mankind into a presumptuous and fatal security. They maintained, "that these doctrines were as false as they were pernicious: that the sins of our first parents were imputed to them alone, and not to their posterity: that we derive no corruption from the fall, but are born as pure and unspotted as Adam came out of the forming hand of his Creator: that mankind are therefore capable of repentance and amendment, and of arriving at the highest degrees of piety and virtue, by the use of their natural faculties and powers: that indeed external grace is necessary to excite their endeavors; but that they have no need of the internal succors of the divine Spirit."*

Dr. Maclaine, the translator of Mosheim, adds to the foregoing account as follows: "The doctrines, which were more immediately connected with the main principles of Pelagius, were, that infant baptism was not a sign or seal of the remission of sins; but a mark of admission into the kingdom of Heaven, which was only open to the pure in heart: that good works were meritorious, and the only conditions of salvation."

It is intimated, that some of the Pelagian sect denied the divinity of Christ: Perhaps these were as consistent as those who believed him to be God as well as man. The Pelagian

doctrine may be considered as the counterpart or continuation of the Unitarian. It is the Unitarian scheme carried into its consequences. It is the effect which that doctrine will have upon the system of religious truth. We have remarked, that if Jesus Christ were but a creature, he was not a competent person to make atonement. The natural conclusion from hence is, that an atonement was not necessary; of course there is no Grace manifested in the salvation of men: It must be the fruit and reward of their own virtue and obedience. These consequences are precisely the doctrines which distinguished the Pelagian system from those opinions which had prevailed in the Church until they appeared. If mankind came into the world, with as great inclination to holiness as to sin; if they are independently capable of amendment; and especially if good works, by which is doubtless intended such works as creatures can perform, are meritorious, and the only condition of salvation; there was no need of a divine Savior. It might be useful, on this plan of doctrine, that an inspired Prophet should be sent into the world, to instruct mankind, and excite them to that virtue which is the only condition of salvation; but there was nothing for him to do as a Savior.

To little purpose is a Savior provided, who is able to bring in everlasting righteousness, and save to the uttermost; in a word, it would be of no avail to mankind, that an atonement has been made, so long as it cannot be a con-

dition of their salvation.—After all, they must save themselves. They must perform works of such merit, that they may appear before God, in the judgment, and claim salvation, not as a favor, but as their right. The very idea of Grace is excluded.

The Pelagians indeed admit, that external Grace is necessary, to excite the endeavors of mankind: yet, by this it appears, they intended nothing more than the necessity of arguments and motives to excite them to the practice of virtue. That which is the meritorious and procuring cause of salvation, is wholly within themselves.—We see, that those two systems, the Unitarian and Pelagian, are nearly allied. The latter expresses the consequences of the former, in relation to the ground of our justification and acceptance with God. Whatever were the opinions which the Pelagians of that day entertained respecting the character of Christ, their scheme of doctrine naturally results from a denial of his divinity: and if Unitarians profess to believe in those doctrines of Grace which stand in connection with an atonement, their system is inconsistent with these doctrines. Let them follow their scheme through all its consequences, and it will lead them, with Pelagius and his followers, to a rejection of the truth, that men are saved, not by works of righteousness which they have done, but of the free Grace of God, manifested in the redemption by Jesus Christ.

We may judge, that the moral tendency of the Unitarian and Pelagian sentiments are ex-

ceedingly similar. Instead of bringing low the loftiness of man, they equally cherish a spirit of pride and self-sufficiency. They uphold mankind in false and delusive hopes, and lead them to think they may safely live without God in the world. They are both calculated to remove from the mind a sense of the malignity and danger of sin; and therefore they take away one of the most effectual incitements to watchfulness and sobriety. Not so is the moral tendency of those doctrines which were taught by St. Paul. He has assured us, that the sentiments which he inculcated, exclude boasting; and he informs us how they have this effect; not surely by giving sinners reason to believe that they can rise, by their own unassisted efforts, to the highest virtue, and that they might claim salvation by the merit of their own works. Had he inculcated such doctrine, he would have laid an ample foundation for boasting. He took away such an occasion of pride and self-complacency, by proving that mankind, by nature, are dead in trespasses and sins; that nothing less than that divine Power, which raised up Jesus from the dead, can raise them up to spiritual life; and those who are saved, are justified freely by Grace, through the redemption that is in Christ.

From the history which Mosheim has given of the Pelagians, we learn what had been the belief of the Church previous to this period. He says, "They introduced doctrines that were new, in the Church, and different from those that were commonly received." He

further informs us what were the doctrines that the Church had received: They were "the original corruption of human nature," or what is usually called the doctrine of original sin, "the necessity of divine influence, to enlighten the understanding and purify the heart." Pelagius introduced his sentiments to combat those doctrines which had been commonly received, because he supposed them to be "prejudicial to the progress of holiness and virtue, and that they tend to lull mankind into a presumptuous and fatal security."

Those doctrines which Pelagius opposed, constitute the basis of that system which, in modern times, is called Calvinism. If we follow them in all their relations and consequences, we shall have the doctrines which Calvin and the other reformers taught many ages afterwards.

It is not uncommon to hear persons speak of the doctrines of Grace, as though they were of modern origin: At least, they appear to suppose they can be traced no farther back than to the time of Calvin. But according to the facts before us, it appears, that in the fifth century, it was an opinion commonly received in the Church, that, by the fall, mankind became sinners; and in order to their salvation, it is necessary that they be the subjects of a supernatural renovation of heart; that they cannot produce this change in themselves, but it must be wrought by a divine Power. The sum of this is, that our salvation is of

God, which is the basis of the orthodox scheme of Grace.

From the account of the respectable historian who has been frequently quoted in this chapter, it is a fair conclusion, that those doctrines had been taught from age to age.

When Pelagius maintained, that "we derive no corruption from the fall of our first parents ; that mankind are capable of repentance and amendment, and of arriving at the highest degrees of piety and virtue by the use of their natural faculties," it appears, that he divulged doctrines which were new, and which excited alarm in the minds of serious and discerning Christians.

Among those who were active to expose and combat this new doctrine, the learned and pious Augustin, bishop of Carthage, took a leading part ; and in opposing the errors of his adversary, he exhibited his own opinions. He appears to have followed the sentiments which had been commonly received, farther into their consequences, than some of his brethren ; or he exhibited the doctrines of Grace, with more system, and to a greater extent. This circumstance procured for him the name of the Doctor of Grace, which was applied to him ages after his decease. He contended, that in the work of conversion, all was to be attributed to a divine energy, and nothing to human agency ; and that God had

determined the future condition of mankind, by a decree. Mosheim says, "To this man is due the principal glory of having suppressed this sect in its very birth."

We are now to see what was the fate of Pelagius and his doctrines. The sentiments of the Church, at that time, were expressed in their measures respecting this Heresy.

Mosheim and Gregory have given us an account of the proceedings of the Church, in relation to the two men who originated the Pelagian doctrine, which we will give in few words. Cælestus continued a while at Carthage, in the hope of preferment; but the discovery of his opinions blasted his hopes. His errors were condemned in a council held at Carthage in the year 412. Pelagius enjoyed a temporary quiet, at Jerusalem, under the protection of John, the bishop of that city. Here he made a public profession of his opinions, and formed disciples. These opinions were condemned anew, by a council at Carthage, in the year 416. From this they appealed to Rome; and by the seeming orthodox confession which Cælestus had drawn up, they were acquitted, and declared to be sound in the faith, by Zosimus, the bishop of Rome. He however soon changed his mind, and condemned them with great severity. Their sentiments were condemned, by a general council at Ephesus, in the year 431.

Dr. Mosheim adds, "In short, the Gauls, Britons, and Africans, by their councils, and

the Emperors by their edicts, demolished this sect, in its infancy, and suppressed it entirely before it had acquired any tolerable degree of vigor and consistence.*

The same historian closes his account of this Heresy, by saying, "The generality of Christians looked upon the opinions of Pelagius as daring and presumptuous ; and even to those who adopted them, in secret, they appeared too free, and too far removed from the notions commonly received, to render the public profession of them advisable and prudent." We cannot have stronger proof of the kind, that the general belief of the Church down to the fifth century, was, that mankind are born in sin ; and that they must be renewed to holiness, by the influence of the divine Spirit ; for these are doctrines which stand in opposition to those of Pelagius.

We learn, however, that many at this period, were disposed to dissent from the common belief ; but the opinions of this Heretic were too free, and so directly in opposition to the general scope, and even language of the Gospel, that it was not prudent to profess them in a public manner.

It appears that they only waited to have some scheme exhibited to them which should retain the spirit of the Pelagian doctrine, and which, at the same time, would seem to conform to the language of the Bible.

It is exceedingly repugnant to the feelings of a carnal mind, to admit the idea of dependence on the mercy of a sovereign God for those influences that can raise us up to spiritual life : and that all which we have done, or can do, will be wholly insufficient to put in as a claim for salvation. From this truth, that we are absolutely and entirely dependent upon God for holiness and happiness, there are many degrees of distance. Some sentiments which have been divulged, are in appearance, at least, farther removed from these doctrines of Grace, than others. But since the idea of salvation, by Grace alone, is supported by the spirit, and indeed by the language of the Gospel, great ingenuity has been displayed to construct a system, which carries an evangelical appearance without removing every occasion of boasting.

An effort of this kind was made, and with considerable success, in the fifth century. The doctrines of Pelagius were thrown into a form, which seemed to admit the necessity of Grace, in the salvation of the creature, while in effect it denied such a necessity. In the controversy which arose about the doctrines of Pelagius, some attempted to mark out a middle course between him and Augustin. These were called Semi-Pelagians. Their peculiar doctrines were—1. That God did not dispense his Grace to one more than to another, in consequence of predestination ; but was willing to save all men, if they complied with the terms of the Gospel—2. Christ died for all

men—3. The Grace, purchased by Christ, and necessary to salvation, was offered to all men—4. Man, before he receives Grace, is capable of faith and holy desires—5. Man, born free, is consequently capable of resisting the influences of the Spirit, or complying with its suggestions.

The spirit of the Pelagian doctrine is retained in this system. It is exhibited in a different form, a form that is better calculated to compose the conscience, because it carries a greater appearance of truth. The Pelagian boldly ascribes the work of salvation to the creature: The other seems to admit the necessity of divine influence, though one article effectually precludes this necessity, and makes the creature his own Savior.

If man, “before he receives Grace, is capable of faith and holy desires,” it is difficult to say what Grace has to do in his salvation. Faith and holy desires are what sinners need, to fit them for the heavenly state and worship; and to form these in the heart, is that which makes divine influence necessary. But if men are capable of these, which it must be admitted are holy exercises, before they are the subjects of divine influence, such influence becomes unnecessary. This is an important step in the progress towards Heaven, which upon the system of doctrine that we are now considering, is within the power of the creature independent of divine influence. It is nothing less

than a rising to spiritual life.—If the creature can do this, without God's special assistance, is he not capable of progressive sanctification, and of becoming completely fit for Heaven? In short is there any thing preparatory for Heaven that is not within his power, if independent of God's special influence, he can exercise faith and holy desires?

St. Paul told the Ephesians, that they were once dead in trespasses and sins. If they, when dead in sin, could of themselves rise to spiritual life, which is implied in the exercise of holy desires, surely having once risen, and become holy, they could sustain themselves, and make progress in the divine life; for greater power cannot be requisite to sustain a principle in exercise, than to create that principle.—We shall attend, in another place, to this, with some other similar systems of doctrine.

From the history of those times, it appears, that though these sentiments, as they were taught by Pelagius, were of short duration, yet they were supported, in the Semi-Pelagian form, by great numbers.

At this period, there was an increasing disposition to reject those doctrines of Grace, which had been handed down by the Apostles, and received by the primitive Christians. Instead of these Apostolic doctrines, the merit of good works began to be a favorite sentiment, especially among the monastic orders. Those

who were in opinion with Augustin, strenuously opposed the Semi-Pelagian system ; but it was not extirpated. In this age, it was difficult to combat sentiments which had found an asylum in the monastery. The various orders of monks were peculiarly inclined to cherish those doctrines which favor the merit of works ; and those orders began, at the time which we are considering, to gain influence. They increased in numbers and influence, until they obtained a complete ascendancy in the Church.

We hear but little of the Pelagians or Semi-Pelagians, after the sixth century. Then we find, that disputes between them and the followers of Augustin, divided the western Churches. Gregory states, that they continued to the middle of the ninth century. Those times of darkness succeeded, in which it is difficult to ascertain what was the faith of the Church, or whether, as a body, she had any faith.

The attention of mankind was directed in a new and strange channel. Instead of searching the Scriptures, to know the mind of Christ, and the doctrines which appertain to salvation, they searched the place of his birth, the scene of his ministry and crucifixion, to find some relic of his body, or of the saints. This is the progress of mankind, as it respects religion. Having begun in the Spirit, they seek to be made perfect by the flesh. Those which are commonly called the dark ages, exhibit a humiliating picture of superstition and folly. The professors

of Christianity had nearly lost sight of the spirit and design of the Gospel.—If it may be said that the visible Church had any system of doctrine, it is probable that the Semi-Pelagian, or something like this, was the predominant system. Though it might not be known by this name, yet the doctrine was agreeable to the views and habits of the monastic orders. We are certain, this, or something like it, was the prevailing doctrine of the Catholic Church when the Reformation began.

CHAP. VIII.

Doctrines of the Reformation.

IT appears to be an established law, in the economy of divine providence, that abuses prove the occasion of their own remedy. When they have proceeded to a certain extent, the eyes of mankind are opened to their enormity, and a reformation is the consequence. If this were not the case, the world could not have remained to this time; for it cannot sustain for a long time, a state of unmingled error and folly. The errors and abuses of the Church of Rome became the occasion of reformation.—It is probable there were always some witnesses

to the truth, in that Church; some who were sensible of her errors and spiritual whoredom, and ardently wished for a Reformation.

The Waldenses and Albigences made some attempts to expose and correct abuses, in the twelfth century; and in the fifteenth, Huss and Jerome made the like attempt, at the expense of their lives. At length the time arrived, when things were ripe for a Reformation; and a suitable instrument was raised up to begin the arduous and eventful task. The Reformation began early in the sixteenth century. MARTIN LUTHER, a native of Eisleben, in Saxony, began to expose the abuses of the Church, about the year of our Lord 1518. It was not till 1555, that the Protestant Church obtained a peaceable establishment.

So far as the opinions of men have weight in determining between truth and error, we may look to the purest times of the Church for the truth; and the purest times have been those in which there were no unnatural connexions of Christianity with civil institutions. Those times have been most pure, when mankind have not been influenced in their opinions, by motives of preferment; when they have espoused the cause of truth, because they prized it above personal ease, or wealth, or honor.

Such was the state of religion during the first three hundred years after Christ. Those who professed the Gospel, had no patronage

from the civil authority. They all knew that their profession exposed them to persecution; and very many actually suffered all the evils which malice could invent. Their temporal happiness, and life itself, were suspended on the caprice of the reigning Emperor. In such a state of things, if they had been governed by a worldly feeling, they would have renounced the name, with every appendage of Christianity. These observations are applicable, in all their force, to the subject of this chapter. If they have any weight, no small degree of importance is attached to doctrines which have been professed and maintained under every circumstance of outward peril. When men are raised up to correct long established error and abuse, to arouse their fellow creatures from long slumber, and give a new direction to the human mind, it is a reasonable conclusion that they are furnished, from on high, to be the organs of truth. Especially, when in consequence of combating established customs and opinions, they must relinquish the hope of worldly ease and comfort; and stand exposed to persecution, we must acknowledge, at least, their sincerity in the belief of doctrines which they propagate.

The reader will see, that these remarks are applicable to those men who first renounced the doctrines and jurisdiction of the Church of Rome. The fortitude of those men who dared to oppose the practices of a formidable community, has been a subject of admiration; and considering the peculiar circumstances in

which they were placed, their doctrines claim great respect.

It cannot, with reason, be supposed, that any other consideration than a sincere and ardent love of truth, could prompt them to go against that formidable opposition which they must meet, in the course which they had chosen. If they wished for personal ease, they took the most effectual measure to deprive themselves of that gratification.—Had they been influenced by a desire to obtain riches, their measures were no better calculated to secure this object. Wealth was principally engrossed by the established Church. If honor had been their aim, all places of honor or profit were at the disposal of the Pope. They could not be ignorant, that the most safe, and effectual way to honor, would be to court the favor of him, who was the source of all Ecclesiastical preferment; and there is evidence, that some of the reformers had very flattering offers of Ecclesiastical preferment, on condition that they would return into the bosom of the Church.

Although these circumstances will not all prove that those who began the Reformation were infallible, yet certainly great respect is due to their persons and doctrines. Moreover, if we consider with most of those writers, who have undertaken to explain the book of Revelation, that these persons were among the witnesses whom Christ raised up, in perilous times, to bear testimony to the truth, the doc-

trines which they taught are entitled to greater regard than those of most uninspired men. In a word, the circumstances in which they were placed, and the effects which were produced, through their instrumentality, lead to the conclusion that they were taught of God.

The principal reformers were Luther, and Melancthon, in Germany; Zuingli, Calvin, and Ecolampadius, in Switzerland; Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley, in England; and Knox, who was a scholar of Calvin, in Scotland. These men were instrumental in effecting a revolution, the most important, in its consequences, of any that has happened since the introduction of Christianity. It has had great influence on the state of science as well as religion. It has delivered the Church from ignorance, and superstition; and given a new direction and spring to human inquiry. It will be a useful employment to review the sentiments of those persons who were instrumental in opening the eyes of mankind, and of bringing the Church into its present state.

Two points are here to be considered:
1. What were the doctrines in dispute between the reformers and the Church of Rome?
2. Were the reformers agreed, in doctrine, among themselves?

1. In regard to the first inquiry, it is admitted, that Luther's opposition to the Church was, at first, excited, by observing the abuses which were practised in the sale of indulgen-

ces. When he examined farther into the reasons of this practice, he saw that it was founded on a principle which is in direct opposition to the spirit of the Gospel, that is, the principle of merit in works.

It is well known, that when the Reformation began, one of the capital errors of the Catholic Church, was, that there is, in works, an intrinsic merit to obtain salvation. It was supposed, that, in some eminent saints, there was a superabundance of merit; or more than the individual needed for his own salvation. The deluded multitude were made to believe, that there was, in the Church, a treasure of merit; and what one eminent saint possessed, more than was necessary for himself, might be applied to the benefit of others.—It seems to have been upon this absurd principle, that the Church claimed the right to grant indulgence, and forgive sins.

Luther saw the absurdity of this principle. It is evident, that he not only opposed the practice of dispensing pardon, and selling indulgence; but he also opposed the principle on which this right was claimed, to wit, the merit of good works.

A short time after Luther had begun to preach the reformed doctrine, Eckius, the Pope's legate, challenged Carlostadt, the intimate friend of Luther, to dispute on the deep subject of free-will. They met at Leipsic :

and Luther appeared, as the second of his friend.—In this dispute, Carlostadt maintained, that since the fall, we have no ability (inclination) to good, but what is derived from divine Grace. Eckius asserted a native power of self-determining volition, to concur with, or resist, the divine operations. The former, representing the doctrines of the Reformation, was the advocate for the sovereignty of divine Grace; the other maintained the power and merit of man, in his co-operation.*

No Calvinist, at the present day, more fully asserts the total moral depravity of mankind, and the necessity of divine influence, to renew them to holiness, than Carlostadt, and his friend Luther. Indeed these two reformers appeared in the defence of those doctrines, which, in the fifth century, Augustin had exhibited against the Palagians and Semi-Palagians. The same doctrines, for substance, constitute, at this day, the Calvinistic system. The Pope's legate, on the other hand, was an advocate for the same sentiments which the Semi-Pelagians maintained. It appears, therefore, that in the progress of the Reformation, this became a point of separation. The Romish Church favored the opinion, that there is, in the creature, a self-determining power; and that he can either co-operate with, or resist, the influences of the Holy Spirit, and make them ineffectual.

The reformers believed the total inclination of the heart to sin; and that all which is good

* Haweis' Ch. Hist. of the Ref. page 22.

in man, is the effect of a divine influence.—
Dr. Haweis asserts,* that the reformers, as
appears by their conferences at Marburg,
were agreed in the following doctrines:

“ 1. Of God’s eternal purpose and predesti-
nation of an elect people, and those compara-
tively few, ordained to life and glory :

“ 2. That man had lost all ability to do
good, and was in his nature, as fallen, only in-
clined to evil :

“ 3. That nothing ever did, or can, alter this
propensity of the heart, but the Holy Ghost,
by his own immediate agency upon the souls
of men :

“ 4. That a sinner is, and can be, justified
by faith only ; and this not of himself, being
unable either to comprehend or receive the
things that be of the Spirit of God ; and there-
fore the faith itself must be the gift of God :

“ 5. That in the creature there is no merit,
nor can be—From first to last, a sinner must
be saved by Grace :

“ 6. That the vicarious atonement, by the
one oblation of Jesus Christ upon the cross,
is effectual, not for the many called, but for
the few chosen.”

The decrees of the council of Trent will
prove, that the reformers separated from the

* Eccles. Hist. of the Ref. page 44.

Church of Rome, on account of doctrine as well as abusive practices. That council was assembled in the year of our Lord 1545, to settle the disputes between the Catholic Church and the reformers ; and to establish the doctrines of that Church. Among other things, that council denounced a curse on all who affirm that works, done before justification, in what way soever they are done, are properly sins, and deserve the displeasure of God.

Again, " If any shall say, the ungodly are justified by faith only ; and that it is, by no means, necessary for them to prepare, and dispose themselves, by the motion of their own wills ; let such an one be accursed.

" If any man shall affirm, that the Grace of justification does not accrue to any, but to those who are predestinated unto life ; and that all the rest are called indeed, but do not receive Grace, on account of their being predestinated to evil ; let such an one be accursed.

" If any shall affirm, that the man who is once justified, cannot thenceforth sin, nor lose Grace, and consequently that he who falls and sins, was never really justified ; let such an one be accursed."*

It is evident, that the doctrines of the Reformation were condemned in this council ; and that those which the council endeavored to establish, were included in the Pelagian and

* Toplady.

Semi-Pelagian system. They denied the necessity of a special influence of the Holy Ghost; predestination, and the final perseverance of all believers; and, in opposition to the reformers, they asserted the merit of works.

We have exhibited, from *Haweis*, a summary of the reformed doctrines. He asserts, that this appears, from their conferences at Marburg, to have been their system of belief.

2. We are to consider, whether they were agreed in this doctrine. This will be admitted, by all, to have been the system which Calvin taught; but it appears to be a prevailing opinion, that this was peculiar to Calvin, and that the other reformers did not harmonize with him. Perhaps such an opinion has prevailed, by the circumstance that it has gone in Calvin's name.

It is true, there was a division between the Lutheran and Calvinistic Churches; but this was not, at first, a division on the ground of doctrine, but the nature of the Eucharist. The Lutherans supposed, that those who received the bread and wine in the Eucharist, did receive the real body and blood of Christ; while the Calvinists considered them as symbols only, calculated to bring to remembrance the body of Christ broken, and his blood shed for the remission of sins. After the Reformation had made considerable progress, and the

Protestant Church had obtained a quiet establishment, the Lutherans did not assent to all the doctrines of Calvin; but at first they were agreed.

The reformers had a conference at Marburg, as observed before. It was in the year 1529. Those who met, were Luther and Melancthon, the German reformers; and Zuingle and Ecolampadius, of Switzerland. Zuingle was at first charged with Heresy by Luther, respecting the divinity of Christ, the efficacy of the divine word, original sin, and some other points of doctrine.

Dr. Mosheim informs us, that Zuingle cleared himself with the most triumphant evidence; and in such a manner as appeared entirely satisfactory to Luther. The same author considers the dissension respecting the manner of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, as the proper and only ground of separation between Lutherans and Calvinists.

We have already produced evidence, that the first reformers were agreed in the belief, that, by the apostacy, all mankind are involved in sin; that they have lost the inclination to choose holiness, and are wholly inclined to evil. No one doubts that the French and Genevan reformers, Zuingle, Calvin, and Beza, taught this doctrine. As little can we doubt that Luther, Carlostadt, and Melancthon, taught the same. This appears, as we have seen, from the conference at Marburg; and

also from the dispute between Eckius, the Pope's legate, and Luther.

We have observed, that the principal reformers in England, were Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley. These, with others associated with them, drew up the thirty-nine articles, in the reign of Edward VI. about the year of our Lord 1550. The reader will recollect, that those articles are continued to this day, as the faith of the English Church. If they are not a representation of the doctrines now taught in that Church, they prove, beyond dispute, what were the doctrines of the English reformers.

The tenth article proves, that they agreed with Calvin, and the other reformers, respecting depravity, and the necessity of divine influence.—“The condition of man, after the fall of Adam, is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength, and good works, to faith: wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant to God, without the Grace of God, by Christ, preventing us, *that we may have a good will*; and working with us, when we have that good will.”

In the second article, they assert the divinity of Jesus Christ, in connection with the design of his atonement, in which they declare their belief in the doctrine of original sin.—“The Godhead and manhood were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very man, who truly

suffered, was dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us ; and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins."

It is manifest, that the reformers were agreed respecting the ground of a sinner's justification, and acceptance with God. No one will doubt that Calvin, with his associates, in the Helvetic Church, believed that a sinner is justified only by the meritorious righteousness of Christ, received by faith ; and that this faith is the gift of God.—The second article of the Church of England, before quoted, implies that this was the faith of the English reformers. Did Luther and his associates in Germany, believe the same ? It appears that they did ; and, as we have seen, this was one point, on which it became necessary to separate from the Church of Rome.

Dr. Mosheim intimates, that the Antinomian sentiment arose from Luther's denying any merit in good works. It should be remembered, that Mosheim was a Lutheran of a different stamp from this great reformer. He has given us intimation of this.* The truth is, the Antinomian sentiment was an abuse of Luther's doctrine. He says, " While Luther was insisting upon the necessity of imprinting deeply upon the minds of people, that doctrine of the Gospel which represents Christ's merits as the source of salvation ; and while he was eagerly employed in censuring and re-

* Ecc. His. Vol. IV. page 303.

futing the Popish Doctors, who mixed the law and the Gospel together; and represented eternal happiness as the fruit of legal obedience; a fanatic arose who abused his doctrine, by overstraining it; and thus opened a field for the most dangerous errors." The errors to which he refers, were the Antinomian. The translator of Mosheim, in a note tells us, that Luther carried the doctrine of justification by faith to such an excessive length, as seemed, though perhaps contrary to his intention, to derogate not only from the necessity of good works, but even from their obligation and importance. He would not allow them to be considered either as the condition or means of salvation, nor even as a preparation for receiving it.* Whether the writers here quoted speak in terms of approbation or not, when they exhibit the doctrines of the Reformation, does not affect the present subject of inquiry. Their testimony is all we want; and that goes to prove that all the reformers believed and taught the same system of doctrine, which is the same with that which is now called the Calvinistic system.

There is no doubt, in the minds of people at this day, that Calvin was a believer in the doctrine of predestination; or that God, of his mere pleasure, chose some of the human race to everlasting life; and that those who were chosen, from eternity, he calls in time, to the praise of the glory of his Grace. It is

* Eccl. Hist. Vol. IV. page 324.

probable, that many now believe this doctrine to have been peculiar to Calvin; and some represent it as originating with him.

The seventeenth article of the Church of England proves, that the English reformers and Calvin were agreed in regard to this doctrine; and it is now, ostensibly at least, the faith of the English Church.

“Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed, by his counsel, to deliver, from curse and damnation, those whom he had chosen, in Christ, out of mankind; and to bring them, by Christ, to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honor: Wherefore they, which be endued with so excellent a benefit from God, be called, according to God’s purpose, by his Spirit, working in due season.” They further say, that “they esteem this a comfortable doctrine to the godly.”

Dr. Maclaine, the translator of Mosheim, had no doubt that Luther was a believer in the doctrine of predestination, no less than Calvin. He says, “The doctrines of absolute predestination, irresistible grace, and human impotence, were never carried to a more excessive length, or maintained with a more virulent obstinacy, by any divine, than they were by Luther: but in these times, he has very few followers, in this respect, even among those that bear his name.”

If any further proof be necessary, we have Luther's own words, in his reply to Erasmus, which will best exhibit his views. Erasmus attacked him, on the doctrines of predestination and grace. He brought the same objection which has been often alledged against these doctrines, that if true, they are useless, and of evil tendency : because they open a door to ungodliness, discourage mankind, and take away motives of amendment. Luther, in reply, says, " Still you urge, where is either the necessity or utility of preaching predestination ? God himself teaches it, and commands us to teach it ; and that is answer enough. We are not to arraign the Deity, and bring the motives of his will to the test of human scrutiny ; but simply to receive both him and it. I will venture to assign, over and above, two very important reasons, for the humiliation of our pride, and the manifestation of divine Grace. God hath assuredly promised his favors to the truly humble. By the truly humble, I mean those who are endued with repentance, and despair of saving themselves : For a man can never be said to be truly penitent and humble, till he is made to know that his salvation is not suspended, in any measure, on his own strength, endeavors, free will, or works ; but entirely depends on the free pleasure, purpose, determination and efficacy, of another, even of God. For the elect's sake, therefore, these doctrines are to be preached, that the chosen of God, being humbled, with the knowledge of his truth, self-emptied, and sunk into nothing, as it were,

in his presence, may be saved, by Christ, with eternal glory."*

It would be easy to produce other evidence, were it necessary, that the reformers were united in that system of doctrine which is now called orthodox. We have their own testimony for proof. What is now called the Calvinistic scheme, was common to them all ; and they separated from the Church of Rome, on account of doctrines which they deemed erroneous, as well as practices which were absurd and abusive. They considered a belief of these doctrines to be essential to Christians. On any other principle, their conduct was perfectly unaccountable ; for in the defence of these, they, at least, exposed themselves to the loss of every worldly comfort. They voluntarily embarked in a cause, which presented to them a prospect of the greatest temporal evils. The fate of Huss and Jerome, their unsuccessful predecessors, was fresh in remembrance ; and Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, Cranmer, Ridley, and Knox, had little less than the same fate to apprehend. When an Englishman casts his eye over the orthodox articles of his Church, and recollects, that for the sake, and in defence of these doctrines, the excellent Cranmer, with many others, suffered the flames of martyrdom, it must be deeply impressed upon his mind, that there was a time when these doctrines were thought to be essential, and were highly prized. This, it may be thought, if nothing else, would inspire him

* Haweis' Hist. Ref. page 48.

with respect for a system of doctrines, for which his ancestors contended in so great peril.

Although the first reformers were agreed in doctrine, it is admitted that the Lutherans soon relinquished some points which their leader urged with zeal and determination. No sooner was Luther dead, than some, who professed to be his followers, manifested a partiality for the Semi-Pelagian doctrine of co-operation, or predetermining power in the will, to comply with, or resist, the influences of the Spirit.

Dr. Mosheim was a modern Lutheran; and when he speaks of the change which the system had undergone, he considers it as being "improved and perfected by time and experience." Not every one, however, will agree with this learned historian, that modern Lutheranism is an improvement; and all will not admit the justness of his reasoning, that time and experience will necessarily perfect a system of religious truth.—Those arts and sciences, the knowledge of which depends wholly on successive efforts of the human mind, receive improvement by time; but this maxim will not apply to the knowledge of divine truth. The progress here, is not the same.—They, who believe the necessity of divine influence, in order that men may know, believe, and practise, the truth as it is in Jesus, will not suppose that one age is necessarily wiser than that which preceded. The natur-

al man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, neither doth he know them, for they are spiritually discerned : but if any man will do the will of God, or has the disposition to receive and obey the truth, he shall know the doctrine.—We are told, that the great truths, which appertain to the kingdom of Heaven, are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes. It is not the case, in religion, that children always begin where their pious fathers left off, improve upon their knowledge, and press on towards perfection. So far from this, they often want the disposition which prompted their fathers to search the Scriptures ; and without a lively sense of the weight and importance of divine truth, men cannot make progress in religious knowledge. As it respects the knowledge of Scripture, mankind more frequently go back than forward. There have been certain periods, in which we find them awakened from inattention and slumber. Influenced by a desire to know and be conformed to the truth, they have pushed their inquiries into the doctrines of the Gospel, and acquired great knowledge in a little time. At those seasons, when attention has been awake, we find them to possess clear and connected views of Gospel truth. In short, they are taught by the influence of that Spirit, which leads into all truth ; and made to discern the things of the Spirit. From those times of special attention, they go back instead of forward, as the spirit of inquiry subsides. Sentiments and morals undergo a change indeed, though not, as some suppose, for the better, but for the worse.

If time and experience necessarily perfect the knowledge of religious truth, we, at this day, must be vastly superior, in this respect, to the reformers ; or even to the fathers of New-England. The fact, however, will not justify such a conclusion. Improvements have been made in regard to the ornaments of style ; but in the knowledge of Scripture, they were our superiors. Those, who read for the sake of a decorated style, will not be amused by the writings of the reformers, or the puritan fathers of New-England ; but those who wish for religious knowledge, will find a real and solid treasure. They are, without ornament, full of evangelical instruction.

Those who believe that religion is revived from darkness and declension, by the special influence of the Holy Ghost, and that God builds up his spiritual kingdom by raising up, and furnishing instruments suited to that end, will be led to conclude that the reformers were furnished to bear testimony to the truth. They will be more especially inclined to this belief, from that long darkness and stupidity which preceded the Reformation.

This appears to have been one of those periods, when it was necessary that God should make a special manifestation of his Grace. Here was need of a peculiar interposition, to check the powers of darkness, and raise up mankind from confirmed stupidity, and deliver a pure Church from the dominion of satan.—It is manifest, from the issue, that

the reformers were the chosen instruments to effect this great change, in the religious state of the world. We have therefore great reason to conclude, that they were furnished, from above, for the important work which was assigned to them.—Though they are not to be regarded as oracles, yet, according to the peculiar circumstances which attended them, and the important revolution which was effected by their instrumentality, their persons and sentiments are entitled to much respect.

CHAP. IX.

Revival of the ancient Heresies after the Reformation.

SECTION I.

IN the preceding chapter, it was observed, that the course of religion is more frequently retrograde than direct : That is, we do not find whole communities in one age, improving, upon the inquiries of those who went before them, in knowledge and virtue. Instead of going on towards perfection, they leave the path in which their fathers walked, and divide into sects and parties. So strong is the bias to error, that we need outward trials to drive

us to our duty. When individuals are placed in circumstances of ease, they begin to be unmindful of their best interest ; and forsake the God of their fathers. Resolutions, which were adopted in the season of trial and alarm, become weak and ineffectual when the trial is removed. The observation holds good, and it is abundantly verified, in the religious state of communities. While they feel the pressure of outward calamity, they keep their true interest in view. Opposition serves to consolidate their union, and trial makes them labor after and prize the truth.—When opposition and trial are removed, they become indifferent to the truth : and sects and divisions are the melancholy consequences which result from a state of luke-warmness and indifference.

The first reformers felt, that they were contending for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. While they were persecuted, this faith was to them a centre and bond of union ; but when they were settled down in a quiet state, the doctrines, for which they had contended, no longer had this effect. Or it is perhaps more natural to suppose, that while the Reformation was yet but weak, and those engaged in the cause were exposed to persecution, but few, if any, would engage in it, except those who were willing to hazard ease, fortune, and even life, in the cause of truth. When it had acquired strength and stability, and those who joined in it were no

longer exposed to those personal evils, it embraced persons whose views and feelings were different from those which actuated the first reformers. Other motives, besides the love of truth, would now engage many to stand on the side of the Protestant cause.

Although the first reformers were united in the orthodox faith ; that is, they all admitted that salvation is wholly the effect of free Grace ; yet other sentiments appeared, soon after the religious peace, concluded at Augsburg, in 1555. By this peace, the reformed Church was established.

The reader will observe, that those sects, which have separated from the body of professing Christians, on account of a different opinion respecting the forms of worship, or of Gospel institutions, are not noticed in this treatise : Likewise, slight and immaterial differences in doctrine are omitted. It is intended to keep in view those doctrines which are immediately connected with, and point out, the way of acceptance with God. We shall bring sentiments into view, which were considered to be Heresy in the primitive times, and treated accordingly, without justifying or condemning the mode in which supposed Heretics were treated. The reader will judge whether they are agreeable to the Gospel or not.

After the death of Luther, there was a manifest disposition to dissent from doctrines

which he maintained. Individuals arose in succession, who suggested, that in the regeneration of the soul, it performed some part : that though divine influence is necessary to turn men to God ; yet there is, in the creature, some power to aid in this work ; a self-determining volition, that men might co-operate with the influences of the Spirit, or resist and render them ineffectual. The reader will, in this, perceive a near resemblance with the doctrine of the Semi-Pelagians. While the reformed Church was struggling with a formidable enemy, and its members could promise themselves but little of worldly comfort, they appear to have been reconciled to the idea of entire dependence upon God to work in them that which is good. They appear to have taken refuge in this truth, and to have drawn consolation from it, while it was with them a time of distress. Those who strictly adhered to the sentiments of Luther, and his companions, in the Reformation, were often called to combat with those opinions which began to appear soon after the Protestant Church was established.

It was about fifty years after the Reformation began, that the Unitarian scheme was revived. Individuals had indeed appeared at an earlier date, who denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. Servetus, whose fate is well known to those who have attended to the history of those times, besides other peculiar and extraordinary sentiments, was an Uni-

tarian.* He was imprisoned at Vienna; but escaping from thence, and passing through Switzerland, he was apprehended, it is said, by the instigation of Calvin.—An accusation of blasphemy was laid in against him, before the magistrates of Geneva. He was tried, and condemned, as an obstinate Heretic, and committed to the flames. This instance of persecution affords melancholy proof of that excess to which the best of men may go, when their zeal overpowers their better judgment. Besides this instance of violence, the character which writers in general give to Calvin, is that of a learned, ingenious, and amiable man. This, however, casts a shade over a character, which is otherwise fair and irreproachable. Those who now disapprove of the sentiments of Servetus, must condemn the measures that were adopted to suppress them. Reason and argument, drawn from Scripture, that fountain of light, are the only suitable weapons for the defence of truth; and these are the weapons, which, in the issue, are most successful.

About the year of our Lord 1550, the Unitarian doctrine first appeared in Italy. Lælius Socinus was the first who revived this Heresy, which was afterwards matured, and reduced to a system, by Faustus Socinus, who was a near relation of Lælius.—According to the account which Dr. Mosheim has given, they held secret assemblies in Italy; but their de-

* Let it, once for all, suffice, that the facts stated in this chapter are principally taken from Mosheim and Gregory.

sign was divulged, and their meetings discovered, by the temerity and imprudence of one of their associates. Two of them were apprehended, and put to death, while the rest took refuge in Switzerland and Germany. Socinus, after wandering through various countries, settled at length in Poland. It is further stated, by the same writer, that the Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists, united their most vigorous exertions to suppress those who denied the divinity of Christ, and a Trinity of persons in the Godhead. Those, therefore, who were of this sentiment, retired into Poland, from this persuasion, that in a country, whose inhabitants were passionately fond of freedom, religious liberty could not fail to find a refuge.—We may consider that Poland was the seat of this revived Heresy, which, from thence, has been spreading over Europe and America.

They lived in peace, while they kept their peculiar doctrines concealed: but having secured the favor of certain noble and opulent families, they began, says Mosheim, to act with more spirit; and even to declare, in an open manner, their opposition to certain doctrines, which were generally received among Christians. Hence arose violent contests between them, and the reformed Churches, with which they had been principally connected. These dissensions drew the attention of the government, and occasioned, in the year 1565, a resolution of the Diet of Patrikow, ordering the innovators to separate themselves from

the Churches already mentioned, and to form a distinct congregation or sect.

Hitherto they had not carried matters so far as they did afterwards; for they professed chiefly the Arian doctrine respecting the character of Christ and the Holy Ghost. By the zeal and dexterity of Faustus Socinus, their sentiments were carried to a greater apparent distance from the prevailing orthodox creed, than those of the ancient Arians.

From that time, they have been, and still are, known by the name of Socinians.—Although they admit the authority of Scripture; yet they maintain, that all its doctrines and institutions are to be explained in a manner conformable with human reason; and of course, what cannot be reduced to a level with reason, is rejected.

Respecting Jesus Christ, they say that he was an extraordinary person, born of the Virgin Mary; that God translated him to Heaven, by that portion of his power, which is called the Holy Ghost; and having instructed him fully there, in the knowledge of his counsels and will, sent him again into this world, to publish to mankind a new rule of life, more excellent than that under which they had formerly lived; to propagate divine truth, by his ministry; and to confirm it by his death.

They confine their rules of morality and virtue to the external actions of men, deny

the necessity of a divine influence upon the heart, and that any thing was effected, by the death of Christ, but a confirmation of his doctrine.* This sect has been spreading over Europe; and appearances indicate its progress in the United States.

Perhaps modern Socinians do not express their views by the same terms, which their predecessors used; and there may be some small variation in their real sentiments; though it is believed that the system is materially the same. It is certain, that they have the same basis. Modern Socinians deny a Trinity of persons in the Godhead; and some of them entertain far more degrading sentiments respecting the character of Christ, than those of the sixteenth century. It is certain, that some persons, of eminence among them, have denied the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures; and under the plausible pretext of being rational Christians, they intend, no doubt, to bring the truths of Scripture to a level with their own reason. This is a summary and certain way to evade the authority of revealed truth.—Whether modern Socinians openly deny the necessity of divine influence or not, their general system of doctrine implies, that such influence, from above, is not necessary, at least in the sense which the reformers and Christians in general have conceived.

* Mosheim, Cent. 16.

Before we dismiss this part of the subject, and while the Socinian doctrine is immediately within our view, let the reader pause, and consult those general impressions which he has received respecting the Gospel. Let him see if he have not ever entertained the idea, that it rests on a foundation essentially and entirely different from the systems of the ancient philosophers. The inquiry here, is not, whether its morality is more pure, or whether it comes from a more certain source ; but whether, as a system, it is not different, in its whole structure, from those plans which men, who have not been favored with a revelation from Heaven, have devised. Do we obtain nothing more by the Gospel, with all that solemnity, and those manifestations of divine glory with which it is introduced, than this merely, that we have a system of morality a little more pure than mankind could obtain without this divine interposition ? Have we not conceived, that it reveals a way of acceptance with God, not to say different from any which human wisdom has devised, but a way which human wisdom never could devise ?

Then let the reader inquire, whether the Socinian doctrine rests on any foundation different from the opinions of the philosophers ? Does it propose any way to secure the favor of God, and the happiness of Heaven, which they could not, and in fact which they did not, propose ? Does it not strike out every thing which has generally been supposed to make the Gospel a distinct dispensation, and

reduce it to a mere system of moral philosophy? Does it not indeed take away that, which makes the Gospel a scheme of Grace, and worthy of all acceptation? Does it comport with that sense of fitness which God has himself implanted in us, that he should institute a worship for his chosen people, consisting, in a great part, of sacrifices which obviously point to an atonement for sin, and which were calculated to leave on the mind a deep sense of the necessity of a propitiation; that a Savior should be announced as the person who was typified in his various offices; that Prophets should be inspired, and sent to describe his person and work, and to comfort the Church with the prospect of deliverance by him—can we suppose such a multitude and variety of ceremonies, so many divine manifestations, and the inspiration of so many Prophets to prepare the Church for the mission of Jesus Christ, if, when he came, he accomplished no more, than to exhibit in a clearer light that law of nature which was already written upon the heart? Do Socinians maintain, that all which was effected by the death of Christ, was a confirmation of his doctrine? Then it is manifest, that the practice of virtue is, in their view, the procuring cause of the favor of God, and the happiness of Heaven. This is the basis of their doctrine. The moral systems of the philosophers rested on the same foundation. Therefore, let it be repeated, *Christianity, in their view, does not differ, in any essential article, from the systems which*

men, without any divine illumination, have framed.

If it should be urged, that the morality of the Gospel is more pure than that of Epictetus, Seneca, or Plato ; this, when granted, will prove no more than a circumstantial difference, or a difference in degree. Still the general plan is the same. All propose the same way to obtain the favor of God.—One system of morality may be more pure than another : but if the ground work of both be the same ; if both propose moral virtue as the procuring cause of salvation, they differ in no essential point. Some of the philosophers taught a system of rules and duties which approached nearer to the purity of Christian morality than others. They were not agreed among themselves respecting the nature of virtue : but in this they were agreed, that they exhibited no other way, but the practice of virtue, to obtain the happiness of Heaven ; therefore they never taught how offenders might be reinstated in the forfeited favor of their Creator. Christians in general have supposed, that it was the principal glory of the Gospel, to reveal a way in which those, who are children of wrath, may be restored to that favor which they have lost ; and that this is a way of pardon and life, which is consistent with the perfect exercise of divine justice. It has been generally supposed, that this makes the Gospel essentially different from every human plan ; and that it was beyond the reach of human wisdom, to devise a way of salvation, for sinners, which

will be safe for them, and honorable to God. This lays a new foundation for faith and hope.

If the Socinian doctrine propose no other way to obtain future happiness, than that which the philosophers of the heathen world had taught, it is exceedingly evident, that it takes from the Gospel that which distinguishes it from every other system. It changes the whole structure of evangelical truth ; and therefore it must, in the general estimation, be deemed a Heresy.

We have seen, that the doctrines of the Reformation were wholly different from those of Socinians. Those men, whose memory is still precious to the friends of evangelical truth, who dared, in circumstances of the greatest peril, to expose the enormous errors of the Romish Church, were Trinitarians. They adhered strictly to the doctrines of Grace ; and for these doctrines, they earnestly contended.

It is admitted, that the Socinian doctrine appeared soon after the Reformation ; but while the reformers were contending with the Church of Rome, and felt the pressure of a powerful opposition, this doctrine did not appear. When it was divulged, it was considered and treated as a dangerous Heresy. We would not be understood to approve of that severity with which some of the earliest Socinians were treated. This persecuting spirit affords a melancholy proof of human imper-

secession. Our present object is to exhibit the views which Christians, in general, entertained at that time, respecting this doctrine. Those, who first openly declared their belief in this sentiment, about the year 1550, were obliged to make their escape. Two of them were apprehended, and put to death ; and the others took refuge in Poland. Though they were not persecuted there as criminals, yet they were excluded from the fellowship of the reformed Churches. By a resolution of the Diet, those innovators were ordered to separate from other Christians, and form a separate congregation.

From these facts, the conclusion is unavoidable, that at the time of which we are treating, sentiment was considered an indispensable term of Christian fellowship ; that those who denied the divinity of Christ, were accounted Heretics ; and Christians, in general, felt themselves bound to withdraw religious fellowship from them.

The reader will recollect, that this was not the first appearance of the Unitarian doctrine. From the time before mentioned, to the present, it has been known by the name of Socinianism, from Socinus, who, after the Reformation, was the principal agent, in arranging these sentiments into a system, and forming a sect of Unitarians. It is a revival of the doctrine of the Ebionites, who were Jewish Unitarians in the primitive ages. It was noticed before, that while the Socinians pretend to receive the

Scriptures as a revelation from God, they bring them to a level with human reason. The Ebionites rejected those parts of Scripture which they could not explain in conformity with their peculiar scheme. They did not receive all the Epistles of St. Paul. In the Gentile Church, Diodotus and Paul of Samosata were excommunicated for similar doctrines.

Some of the companions of Socinus, at first, embraced the Arian scheme. It will be recollected, that this was condemned, as a Heresy, by the Council of Nice, which was composed of a vast assembly of Ecclesiastics from all parts of the Christian world. That assembly considered, that those, who denied the Deity of Christ, had forfeited the character and privileges of Christians : for it was decreed, that they should not be received to the fellowship of the Church, even though they had renounced their errors, until they were rebaptized.

Lest it should be thought that we are laying too great stress on the opinions of men, let the reader bear in mind, that our object is to shew what were the doctrines of the primitive and reformed Churches, and what were the views which they entertained respecting the Unitarian and other schemes of doctrine which differed essentially from the common belief. The opinions of the primitive Christians, and of the reformers, should have no

more weight, in our estimation, than those of any uninspired men of similar character, and placed in similar circumstances. We maintain, however, that such were the peculiar circumstances in which they were placed, that we must give credit to their sincerity. They were not influenced, in their religious choice, by the desire of popularity, or worldly ease : for had they been governed by such motives, they would have made a different choice ; and their religion exposed them too much to persecution, to have it supposed they would voluntarily embrace a lie. They would not suffer such outward perils, for the sake of a particular system of doctrine, unless they had been persuaded of its truth.

SECTION II.

AFTER the reformed Church was established, other systems of doctrine, beside the Socinian, appeared, which were not agreeable to the creed of the reformers. The Reformation was an era, in which the attention of mankind, especially of those who took a part in this great event, was powerfully drawn to a consideration of Gospel doctrine. It was a time when there was, among the active reformers, a remarkable union of sentiment. As we look forward of this event, into the history of the Church, we shall find dissenters from the orthodox faith under various names.

In the former chapter, some of the articles of the Church of England were quoted, for the

purpose of exhibiting the doctrines of the English reformers. Archbishop Cranmer, who was a martyr of the doctrines which he had espoused, was a principal agent in the compilation of those articles, which are still retained, as the creed of the English Church. If any doubt remain respecting the primitive orthodoxy of the Church of England, the thirteenth article, with those which have been already exhibited, affords indubitable proof, that the English reformers and Calvin were agreed in doctrine. In this article it is said, "Works, done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God; forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, *neither do they make men meet to receive grace.*"

The first account which we have of a departure from this orthodox creed in England, was in the reign of Edward III. when the Reformation was just established, and the articles and liturgy were framed. Then a sect arose, who were called Free-willers, or Freewill-men.†

Strype, in his Ecclesiastical Memorials, quoted by Toplady, observes, "In the year 1550, sectaries appeared in Essex and Kent. These were the first that made separation from the Church of England, having gathered congregations of their own, viz. one in London, one at Feversham in Kent, and another at Bocking in Essex." The same writer adds, "These Free-willers were, it seems, looked upon in so

† Toplady, vol. I. page 48.

dangerous a view, by the Church of England, that they were complained of to the Privy Council, and examined in the Ecclesiastical Court. They denied the doctrines of original sin, special grace, and predestination.*

We have observed, that soon after the death of Luther, and when the reformed Church had obtained a peaceable establishment, individuals in Germany and Holland manifested a disposition to reject the idea of absolute dependence on Grace, and to favor the Semi-Pelagian doctrines. Persons of this description increased in the reformed Church. No sect, however, was formed on this plan of doctrine, until the beginning of the seventeenth century, almost one hundred years after the Reformation began.—James Arminius, a professor of divinity in the University of Leyden, taught a system of doctrine which differed, in some material articles, from that of the reformers. He was joined by some persons of talents and influence, and a distinct sect was formed, which has been called Arminian. It will be seen, on a comparison of this with the system of the Semi-Pelagians, that they rest on the same basis, and ascribe the same degree of efficacy to divine influences, in the salvation of a sinner.

The sentiments of the Arminians are—

1. That God has not fixed the future state of mankind, by an absolute, unconditional de-

* Toplady, vol. I.

cree ; but determined to bestow salvation on those who, he foresaw, would persevere in the faith ; and to inflict everlasting punishment on those who should continue in unbelief.

2. Jesus Christ, by his sufferings, made atonement for the sins of all mankind in general, and of each individual in particular.— However, none but those who believe in him, can be partakers of his divine benefits.

3. Mankind are not totally depraved ; and that depravity does not come upon them, by virtue of Adam's being their public head ; but that mortality, and natural evil only, are the direct consequences of sin to his posterity.

4. There is no such thing as irresistible Grace in the conversion of sinners.

5. Those who are united to Christ by faith, may fall from their faith, and forfeit finally their state of Grace.*

They also believe there is, in the creature, a self-determining power, either to comply with, or resist the influences of the Spirit and make them ineffectual.

As we shall, in another place, compare the Arminian plan of doctrine with some other systems of a more modern date, and which have the same moral tendency, we shall not

* Mosheim, Century 17.

make any observations here respecting its correspondence with the Gospel. A few remarks will be offered respecting those sects which have the same foundation, and which allow the same place, and the same degree of efficacy, to divine influence.

At present, let us inquire what was the general state of religious opinions when the Arminian system was divulged? How was it treated at that time? And what progress did it make in succeeding ages?

1. There is evidently a wide difference between this system of doctrine, and that of the reformers; and this difference chiefly results from that degree of efficacy which they respectively ascribe to divine influence, in the salvation of sinners.—The reformers believed and taught the original apostacy of mankind; their total moral inability, or indisposition to that which is spiritually good; the necessity of a special influence of the Holy Ghost, to raise them up from spiritual death to spiritual life; justification by faith, and this faith they believed to be the gift of God. In a word, they maintained that the salvation of a sinner is to be ascribed to the electing love and free grace of God. It has been already admitted, that among those who succeeded the reformers, some individuals favored the Semi-Pelagian doctrine of a power to co-operate with, or resist, the influences of the Spirit. This plan seems to admit the necessity of divine influence, in the conversion of a sinner, though it

does, in effect, ascribe a large portion of that work to the creature ; for it supposes the issue to depend on his own will, or rather the use which he makes of his will. This disposition increased, as the Protestant Church was enlarged, until the time of Arminius, when there was a number, sufficiently large to constitute a sect, who rejected some of the principal doctrines upon which the Reformation began.

It is worthy of observation, that as we follow the history of the Protestant Church down from the Reformation, we may perceive an increasing disposition to reject the doctrines of the reformers, and to receive those sentiments which the Church of Rome expressed at the council of Trent, when they condemned those of the Reformation. But a little less than one hundred years had elapsed, from the time when the Reformation first began, until those disputes and dissensions which were excited by the doctrines of Arminius. This was a space of time long enough to admit of very great changes in the religious state of the world. In that length of time, the spirit which actuated the reformers would of course subside, unless it had been maintained by repeated and very extensive influences of the Spirit of truth and holiness. Without such divine interpositions, mankind would relapse into a careless, worldly, and selfish frame. They would probably fall in with that system of doctrine which they should find most favorable to their stupidity. In a word, there had been sufficient time to produce a generation, who were governed by

views and feelings entirely different from those which the reformers manifested.

Beside England and Scotland, it appears, by the account of Mosheim, that the Protestants in France, Holland, and Switzerland, received the doctrines of Calvin, before and at the time when Arminius published his sentiments. Though many of the Lutherans, in Germany, and the northern nations of Europe, had fallen into the Semi-Pelagian and Socinian systems, yet many others were Calvinists, in doctrine, while they were yet separate from the Calvinistic Church on account of their different opinions respecting the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Lutheran Church was divided, in regard to doctrine. Some, it appears, were Calvinists, some were Semi-Pelagians, while others were inclined to the Socinian scheme.

2. When the doctrines of Arminius were published, they produced an agitation in the public mind, which proves that they were considered an innovation upon the system of religion which had been generally received. Though, as observed before, in the lapse of one hundred years, a very considerable change had taken place in the views of mankind, and in the state of religion ; and many only waited for some person of boldness and enterprize to take the lead, and form a sect of dissenters from the doctrines of the Reformation : yet, when that leader appeared, and taught a system of doctrine different from that which their

fathers had embraced, it appears the majority of Christians were not prepared for so great an innovation. There was a very powerful opposition to the new sect, among the Protestants of France, Switzerland, England, Holland, and Scotland. We speak of this as a sect which was then new ; and it was new in the Protestant Church ; though it was in reality but a revival of the Semi-Pelagian system. The doctrines of Arminius were not accepted by a majority, otherwise he and his associates would have been supported. The event proves, that the reformed Churches, in general, viewed with horror, the doctrines of the sectarian and his followers ; for they were excommunicated with the greatest severity. While we review the methods which were used to convince and reclaim the Arminians, we must disapprove of the means, however the object which was aimed at was good. If the Arminians taught a system of doctrine, which, in its tendency, would counteract the true design of the Gospel, it was the duty of the Church to use lawful means to reclaim and bring them back to the truth. But neither corporal punishment, nor confiscation of their estates, were the best means which could have been chosen to effect this desirable end.

Arminius was joined in Holland, by several persons of talents and influence.

However, Mosheim says,* “ He met with the warmest opposition from the principal pro-

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* Century 17.

fessors in the Dutch universities. The magistrates exhorted the contending parties to moderation and charity; but it was in vain. After long, and tedious, and sometimes tumultuous debates, the controversy was, by the authority of the Prince of Orange, referred to the decision of the Church, assembled in a general Synod at Dort, in the year of our Lord 1618.

In some respects, the Synod of Dort resembled the council of Nice. The latter was assembled to settle the difficulties which the doctrines of Arius had excited in the Church. The former was called on account of the dissensions which arose about the doctrines of Arminius.—The council of Nice was a very numerous assembly of Ecclesiastics. Deputies, from all parts of the Christian world, represented the Churches in this council. The Synod of Dort, though not altogether so numerous and general, yet it was composed of representatives from the principal states and kingdoms which embraced the Protestant religion. Beside the most eminent divines of the United Provinces, there were, at this Synod, deputies from the Churches of England, Scotland, Switzerland, Bremen, Hussia, and the Palatinate. The doctrines of the Arminians were condemned. Had the Synod stopt here, after exposing and disapproving the errors of their opponents, it would have been well; but a melancholy scene of persecution ensued. The Arminians were excommunicated: They were driven from their

Churches, and from their country, into exile ; and many of them were reduced to poverty.*

Although these violent measures cannot be justified on the principles of Christian forbearance ; yet the decisions at Dort furnish us with evidence respecting the state of religious opinions at that time. It is undeniable, that during one hundred years, from the beginning of the Reformation to the Synod of Dort, the Protestant Churches had, in general, received the doctrines of Grace, according to the system of the reformers.

The thirty-nine articles of the Church of England are a standing proof, that when they were adopted as the national creed, that Church was orthodox. Archbishop Abbot, the primate of the kingdom, who was one of the deputies at the Synod of Dort, was a Calvinist. He and his associates maintained, in that assembly, the doctrines of the first reformers, against the innovations of Arminius. The French Protestants, according to Mosheim, received the system of Calvin. This system was received in Switzerland : and it was the predominant belief in Holland, as the decisions at Dort will prove. It is therefore evident, that during the space of one hundred years, the doctrines which the Protestant Church in general received, were those which are now called Calvinism, or similar to those which are expressed in the thirty-nine articles ; that

* Haweis, Cent. 17.

the Arminian sentiments, though not new, were an innovation upon the faith which had been commonly received; and that the system was accounted a Heresy.

3. What was the progress of this system, after the Synod of Dort?

If the doctrines of the Reformation were generally received among Protestants, until the time of this Synod, it cannot be said that they maintained the ascendancy long after that time. We come now to a period when they declined with rapidity. Their rigid purity did not accord with that levity and freedom which prevailed, especially in the reign of Charles I.

The disposition to reject the idea of absolute dependence upon divine influence, to make sinners willing to accept the terms of life, which appeared previous to the Synod of Dort, increased with a rapid progress, after that assembly. The state of religious opinions in England underwent a great change, in favor of the Arminian doctrine. This change was principally effected by the influence of William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, to whose direction King Charles I. had entrusted the religious concerns of the kingdom. From the accounts which writers have given of the character and measures of Laud, it appears that he was a very ambitious man. He was extravagantly fond of decorating the externals of religion with pomp and ceremony; of course he was not pleased with that simplicity of doc-

trine and worship which distinguished the reformers. He labored strenuously to change the religious state of the kingdom, that nothing might remain which was peculiar to the Reformation, either of doctrine, discipline, or simplicity of worship. This change he effected; for in the reign of Charles I. the doctrines of Predestination and Grace were publicly rejected; and the Arminian system was substituted in their place, though contrary to those articles which were established, by law, as the religion of the kingdom.* The violence of Laud proved, in the issue, favorable to the settlement of New-England. He was an enemy to those who plead for the purity and simplicity of the reformed doctrine and worship. He persecuted them without mercy. They were driven to the extremity, that many pious and very respectable men sought and found a refuge in the wilds of New-England.

Respecting the Protestants of France, though at first they gave a favorable reception to the decisions at Dort, yet as those decisions were very obnoxious to the Catholics, among whom they lived, they thought it their duty to be cautious and circumspect; and in process of time, their real sentiments underwent a gradual change, from the Calvinistic to something nearly resembling the Arminian system.

Though the Churches of Holland professed to retain the doctrines of the Reformation; yet

by degrees they departed from them, and embraced a less rigid and humiliating plan.

When the settlement of the New-England colonies began, it may be said, with truth, that no where, except in Scotland and Geneva, were the doctrines of the Reformation retained in their primitive purity.

Though it be admitted, that in a very few years after the Synod of Dort, there was a great change in respect to doctrine, it is no less true, and it is worthy of observation, that there was also a great change in manners. Writers, who have given the history of those times, generally testify, that a great degree of profligacy and dissipation had succeeded the purity of the reformed Church. In the reign of Charles I. the doctrines of the Reformation were rejected by some of the principal dignitaries of the Church, though it is probable that many members of the established Church still adhered to the decisions of the Synod of Dort, and the articles. It is not probable, that a change, so great, as that from the doctrines of the Reformation to the Arminian plan, could take place, in the whole body of the Church, within so short a time. Beside the established Church, dissenters began to increase in the kingdom. These, together with those in the Church who had been long called Puritans, bore testimony against the error and profligacy which prevailed. They called loudly for a Reformation in the government and doctrines of the Church. The despotic disposi-

tion of Charles, hurried on by the impetuous and superstitious Laud, and their extreme fondness for ceremony and show in religious worship, drove the dissenters to desperate measures for relief. They united to overturn a government which had become generally odious, and placed Cromwell at the head of the nation. Cromwell was disposed to favor the Puritans and dissenters, by whose influence and exertion he was raised up to the summit of power; and the dissenters were generally Calvinists, and zealously engaged for greater purity of doctrine, and simplicity of worship and manners: yet the confusion and disorder of this interval, were by no means favorable to the promotion of pure religion.

On the accession of Charles II. the scene was changed. The Puritans were no longer favorites at the court. They were persecuted with severity; and instead of a Reformation, there was a great increase of profligacy. Charles was a gay Prince. He was given to pleasure; and this disposition led him to abhor the humiliating doctrines, and simple manners, which prevailed for a considerable time after the Reformation. His favors were of course bestowed on men of sentiments and dispositions similar to his own. The dissipation of the court afforded encouragement to every abomination. If we except the Puritans, all ranks of men imbibed the example which the court exhibited. As little, if not less remained of the primitive purity in manners, than there was of the reformed doctrines.

The doctrines and lives of the Puritans became the subjects of ridicule. As seriousness of deportment was sufficient to stigmatize a man as a Puritan, and exclude him from the favors of the court, the established clergy were careful to avoid this imputation, which would destroy the hope of Ecclesiastical preferment. Instead of reproving, they imitated the gay and profligate manners which prevailed.

Writers inform us, that there was also a great change in the mode of preaching. Scientific essays, succeeded the plain and evangelical sermons of the primitive times. They set aside those peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, which are most effectual to penetrate the hearts of sinners; and confined their instructions to descriptions of the beauty of virtue. Sermons more polished, but far less penetrating, than those of the reformers, became fashionable. The clergy of this period tried the vain experiment to make men virtuous, while they kept out of sight those peculiar enforcements to virtue which the Gospel furnishes, until the power of godliness was nearly lost. Thus Ecclesiastical writers inform us, that the doctrines of the Reformation were gradually laid aside in England; and the true spirit and import of the thirty-nine articles were disregarded. They also testify, that profligacy and licentiousness of manners increased, as these peculiar doctrines of Christianity were rejected.

SECTION III.

IN the review which we have taken of the religious state of the Protestant Church, after the Reformation, but especially after the Synod of Dort, we see what is the progress of religion among mankind, when there is no special divine influence to awaken their attention, and recall them to the truth. They will depart farther from it, from age to age, until they lose sight of every thing which is peculiar to the Gospel. The first reformers separated from the Church of Rome, on account of her errors in doctrine, and those abuses in practice, which naturally result from erroneous opinions. If any one will compare the Arminian system with the tenets which are exhibited in the decisions of the council of Trent, and established as the faith of the Catholic Church, he will see a striking similarity. They ascribe the same degree of efficacy to divine influence, in the salvation of the sinner, and the same degree of merit to human works. About one hundred years after the reformers separated from the Church of Rome, their descendants received that very system of doctrine, which was a principal cause of separation. They had likewise, in England, adopted a mode of worship, and Ecclesiastical government, which nearly resembled that of the once abhorred Romish Church.

In the events which followed, we shall see the truth of a remark which we have already had occasion to make, that errors and abuses, when carried to a certain extent, become indi-

rectly the means of reformation. They serve to open the eyes of some individuals, who sound the alarm of impending ruin. The errors and immorality which prevailed in England, in the latter part of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, increased the number of the Puritans. We have already had occasion to mention these people; but now it is necessary that we should give some account respecting the origin of this name, and the doctrines which they received.

The rise of the Puritans in England introduced a new and important era in the Christian Church. Some of them separated from the Church of England, and adopted the Presbyterian government. Others did not separate from the established Church; but they were dissatisfied with the government and discipline, and some things pertaining to the mode of worship. Some refused to subscribe to all the articles which relate to Ecclesiastical government—and on this account they were called Non-conformists. But what makes their history peculiarly interesting to us, is, that the first settlers of New-England were of this class of people. When we ascertain what religious sentiments they received, we shall have the primitive doctrines of New-England: for they instituted Churches here, upon the plan of doctrine and government which they failed to accomplish in England.

It has been sometimes represented, that all those, who first emigrated from England, and

planted colonies here, had previously separated from the established Church. This was not the case with all. Those who settled at Plymouth, and were called the Plymouth colony, had, about thirty years before the emigration to New-England, separated from their Church, with Mr. Robert Brown, and settled in Holland. They afterwards were under the pastoral care of Mr. Robinson.

The Massachusetts colony principally consisted of Puritans ; yet they had not separated from the established Church ; but had lived in communion with her. Many of those worthy ministers, who settled and preached in the colony, had received ordination by English Bishops, and officiated in their parish Churches, until the obnoxious ceremonies were increased and imposed with rigor, and they saw no prospect of reform. At length they sought relief from their difficulties, by coming to this country.

Mr. Prince, of Boston, in his New-England Chronology, has given a short account of the rise and progress of the Puritans, with the doctrines which they received. This account is chiefly taken from Neal, Burnet, Strype, and Eachord. By this it appears, that even from the Reformation in England, there was a division among Christians, respecting Ecclesiastical government ; but more especially, respecting the ceremonies of worship. Some were in favor of laying aside all those ceremonies which were not warranted by Scripture,

and Apostolic usage. Others thought it expedient to retain many ceremonies, which could not be proved, from Scripture, to be essential. Some were in favor of a simple form of Ecclesiastical government, like the Churches of Scotland and Geneva: but the greater part were for the Episcopal form. This difference of opinion continued. At first, it was confined to the ceremonies and Church order; for both parties were agreed, at first, in the doctrinal part of the articles, and remained so until after the Synod of Dort. Afterwards, there was a disagreement in respect to doctrine. This difference gave rise to the name of Puritans: therefore the Puritans may be traced back to the time when the Reformation took place in England. Fuller, an English writer, who is quoted by Mr. Prince, says, that Rogers and Hooper were Puritans, because they were in favor of a more simple form of worship, and a purer discipline, than most of those who were engaged in the Reformation. These divines lived in the reign of Edward VI. and they both suffered martyrdom in the reign of Queen Mary I.

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the Church began to exercise severities towards the Puritans. The Parliament appeared to be unwilling to enforce a subscription to all those articles which were obnoxious; but the Queen and Bishops insisted upon a strict and universal conformity to the ceremonies of the Church.

The only act of Parliament which established the articles during this and the following

reign, was in 1571; yet this was favorable to the Puritans; for it only required that "ministers should declare their assent, before the Bishop of the Diocese, to all the articles of religion, which only concern the confession of the true Christian faith, and the doctrine of the sacraments." The Puritan ministers were ready to subscribe to all the doctrinal articles, according to the true meaning of this act; but the Bishops proceeded to enforce their assent to all the articles relating to ceremony as well as doctrine; and those who refused were deprived of their places. These acts of severity influenced some of the Puritans to separate, and adopt the Presbyterian government. In 1572, the first Presbytery was instituted in England.

Mr. Prince observes, that if the ceremonies had been left, as a matter of indifference, the Popish habit changed for more comely garments, the Pope's decrees abolished, and the Hierarchy reformed, the Puritans would have been contented with the general frame of Episcopal government: but when the Bishops proceeded to enforce all the articles, and to deprive those who refused of their parishes, such rigor produced separations. Still he observes, that the Separatists were few compared with the number of those who were dissatisfied with the religious state of the Church.

It appears, that as the doctrines of the Reformation were changed, for more lax senti-

ments, the Puritans were oppressed the more, by the rulers of the Church. In 1583, Whitgift was made Archbishop; and Boncraft succeeded him in 1603. These men exerted all their power to crush the Puritans. Abbot, who succeeded Boncraft in the primacy, (says Prince) seeing that the Puritans adhered more strictly to the doctrinal articles than the rest of the Church, treated them with lenity. He was, however, succeeded by Laud, the most inveterate enemy of the Puritans, and indeed of the reformed doctrines. It was at this time that they were treated with the greatest severity. They lost all hopes of the Reformation which they desired; for the change that took place in the doctrines of the Church in the reign of Charles I. operated entirely against their views. New-England opened to them the prospect of a settlement, where they might enjoy the Gospel in its purity, and institute Churches upon that plan of government which they believed to be according to the simplicity of the Gospel.

It evidently appears, that the Puritans were satisfied with the doctrinal articles of the Church; and though Episcopal government was not their choice, yet they would have acquiesced in this form. At first they contended for simplicity of worship, and purity of discipline; but when the doctrines of the Reformation were rejected, and the Arminian system became the religion of the established Church, there was a wider separation. The Puritans adhered to the true spirit of the arti-

cles. Indeed, the principal object of their labors was to bring every thing, appertaining to religion, doctrine, worship, Ecclesiastical government, and manners, back to the purity of the Reformation. Their serious deportment, and the purity of morals at which they aimed, made them peculiarly odious to the licentious court of Charles. Archbishop Laud viewed them as an obstacle in the way of his plans to aggrandize the clergy, consequently they fell under a heavy weight of oppression.

To fix a degree of prejudice on the public mind against the views of these persons, they have been represented as a licentious set of people, who aimed at an extreme of liberty inconsistent with Ecclesiastical order ; and in this insinuation, Puritans and Separatists are considered as the same people. We have seen, that all who were Puritans did not separate from the established Church. Among those who early broke off from the Church, and instituted a separate form of government, there might be some blameable excesses ; but those Puritans who came to New-England were so far from being a disorderly people, that for the sake of order, they endured peculiar trials. They continued in communion with a Church, which they believed was not governed according to the simplicity of the Gospel, rather than make disorder by a separation.

It has been insinuated, that they were a superstitious people. There are times when

purity of life is called superstition. The fathers of New-England were eminent for piety ; and in their day there was a simplicity and purity in manners, which, at this time, is rarely found. If it be superstition to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the world, they unquestionably deserved this character. They were not like some at the present day, who refuse to have communion with a Church, because it is not governed in all respects according to their particular views of Gospel order.

This short account of the Puritans in England, will furnish us with proof respecting the orthodoxy of the first settlers in New-England. The Puritans may be traced back to the time of the Reformation in England. They were, at first, in favor of simplicity in worship and Ecclesiastical government. It appears, that they would have chosen a plan similar to that which was instituted by Calvin at Geneva, or by Knox in Scotland. Toplady informs us, that some of them had a correspondence with Calvin respecting Ecclesiastical government ; and the advice which that reformer gave, affords a proof of his candor : For though it is evident, that Episcopal government was not his own choice, yet in the circumstances of the English reformers, he advised them to acquiesce in such a plan. The Puritans received the doctrines of the Reformation, and retained them. In that great change of doctrine from the Calvinistic to the Arminian system, which was effected soon after the

Synod of Dort, it does not appear that there was any material change in their views. They never hesitated to subscribe to all the doctrinal articles of the Church; and it appears, they subscribed to these from principle, or because they approved of them.—From their general character, we may conclude that they would not readily subscribe to articles of religion, which they did not in heart approve. When the body of professors adopted the Arminian doctrine, which was about the time when the settlement of New-England began, and many who subscribed to the articles disregarded their true spirit, the Puritans received them in all the extent which the reformers intended. It is abundantly evident, that the doctrines of the Reformation were retained by the Puritans: In other words, they received that system which is now called Calvinism; for we have seen, that in regard to doctrine, Calvin, Luther, Beza, Knox, Cranmer, Ridley, and Hooper, were agreed.

The Puritans came to New-England with a strong attachment to these doctrines. They established Churches upon the plan of Calvin; and the primitive divines of this country, exhibited these doctrines, in their discourses. Thus the doctrines of the Reformation constituted the primitive faith of New-England.

The doctrinal part of the thirty-nine articles, is contained in the Assembly's Chatechism, which is more universally known in

this country. They have the same foundation, and contain the same general principles. The only difference is, that in the Catechism the doctrines of Grace are more distinctly specified, than they are in the articles. If any doubts yet remain respecting the primitive orthodoxy of New-England, or whether the first settlers received the doctrines of Grace, they must be removed by the consideration that the Catechism was the general standard. Its universal use in the time of our forefathers, proves that it contains the general faith which was then received. The primitive divines of this country explained the articles of the Catechism at large, in their preaching and in their writings. It was considered, as an essential part of family instruction, that this system of doctrine should be instilled into the minds of the youth. Colleges were founded and endowed by men of Puritanical sentiments, and with a particular view to the propagation of religion on the principles of the Reformation. They were guarded, (as it was then supposed) with every necessary precaution, against the introduction of any essential errors. These men considered every essential departure from that system of doctrine which is contained in the Assembly's Catechism, as a departure from the spirit of the Gospel, and dangerous to the Church ; and those, who introduced new and different sentiments, were accounted public offenders.

The primitive divines of New-England were distinguished for piety and zeal ; but

theirs was not a blind, intemperate, or ill-directed zeal. They were, by no means, deficient in the learning of that age. Like the first reformers, they appear to have considered mere ornament of style as a subordinate attainment: but though their style be not highly decorated, it may be said that in the knowledge of the Scriptures they were superior to most of their descendants. An appeal might be made to the writings of the primitive New-England divines, as an additional proof that they believed and taught the doctrines of Grace; but such an appeal must be considered unnecessary. We have already sufficient proof, that the first New-England Churches were instituted on the plan and principles of the Reformation.

In later times, we have seen, in this country, the revival of those systems of doctrine which were supposed to be Heresies, during the first four centuries of the Christian era; and for a considerable space of time after the Reformation. They have had, perhaps, a more certain progress here, because they have mingled with orthodox professors: By such mixture, it has been difficult to discover and expose the error.

The Arminian system of doctrine was introduced; and many appeared to favor this plan, at a considerable early period. Calvinists and Arminians have been included here, in the same congregations, and sometimes in the same Churches. In some, the Calvinis-

tic, and in others, the Arminian system has been the prevailing belief. Those who received the Arminian doctrine, have inclined, within a few years, to the Socinian plan. There is a natural alliance between them: and it was observed, that in England and Holland, Arminians were inclined to fall into the Arian and Socinian systems. The inclination to the Unitarian doctrine, appears to have been for a considerable time, concealed in New-England. The Assembly's Catechism, until lately, was carefully instilled into the minds of the youth. By this mode of instruction, the public mind was so accustomed to orthodox sentiments, that it was not prepared for the exhibition of a scheme so repugnant to the doctrines of Grace, as the Unitarian. Where the Assembly's Catechism has been taught, it has proved an inclosure to guard the Church, and the minds of people in general, against the introduction of erroneous and delusive sentiments. It is to be lamented, that for some years past, the Catechism has been but little used. It is indeed almost wholly neglected, and the consequences are very apparent. One of the guards against erroneous doctrines, and pernicious divisions, is taken away; and the public mind has advanced rapidly towards that state, in which it can, without great alarm, witness the denial of those doctrines which once were deemed essential and sacred.

In some parts of New-England, Unitarians openly profess and propagate their sentiments, which, during the three first centuries, and

also for a considerable time after the Reformation, were accounted so pernicious, that those who adhered to them, were cut off from the fellowship of the Churches, and viewed as aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. This doctrine, it is believed, has been increasing among us with considerable rapidity; and that, as far as its influence extends, it prostrates every thing which is peculiar to the Gospel, as a dispensation of Grace.

It is worthy of observation, that those persons who have adopted all the doctrines of the Arminian system, have discovered a disposition to favor the Unitarian plan. When they have not openly adopted it, they view its progress with much less regret than do the Calvinists. The former appear to consider it an immaterial error, and in no great degree prejudicial to the interests of religion. The latter view it as a dangerous Heresy, which tends to subvert the nature and destroy the salutary effects of the Gospel. As Arminians are observed to view, with indifference, the progress of the Socinian doctrine, the present appearances lead us to conjecture that those, who do not adopt the Calvinistic doctrines of Grace, will ultimately join with the Unitarians.

SECTION IV.

BESIDE the Arminian system, which has been the religious belief of many in the New-England states, the present age has witnessed the revival of the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian

Methodists
doctrine, in the Wesleyan Methodists, and a sect of Baptists who are commonly called Free-willers. These are here brought into view, in connection, because their sentiments are substantially the same. In this connection, we may also consider the Quakers, a sect which appeared first in England, about the middle of the seventeenth century ; and though it never made any great progress in Europe, yet a considerable number of people in the United States have adopted this plan of doctrine. These are also mentioned, in connection with Methodists and Free-willers, because the general principles, which they profess to receive, are very similar. The opinions of the Wesleyan Methodists may be collected from a platform which they have published. The Free-willers have not yet published any system of doctrine ; but their sentiments may be collected from those who speak in their assemblies.

It appears to be an object with these denominations, while in effect they renounce the general doctrine of salvation by Grace alone, to give at least an evangelical and orthodox appearance to their system. They manifest a great degree of zeal, and apparent concern for the souls of men. They often speak of Grace, and divine influence, and the necessity of regeneration. It appears, however, upon examining the whole structure of their scheme, that they have no definite or uniform meaning to the term Grace. By an appearance of orthodoxy, and zeal for the cause of religion, many persons, who are really attached to the

doctrines of Grace, have been influenced to join them: for it has been observed, that persons are found in their societies, who are not apprized of the real nature and tendency of their system.—Though their preaching has an evangelical appearance, yet when they are examined on the essential doctrines of the Reformation, they manifest a fixed and virulent opposition.

It will be our object, in this section, to shew, that the Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians, Arminians, Quakers, Wesleyan Methodists, and Free-willers, have adopted the same system of doctrine. The system of each is similar, because they all, in a similar degree, deny the necessity of divine influence; and the whole structure of a man's religious sentiments, will depend on the degree of efficacy which he ascribes to this, in the salvation of a sinner. The Pelagian and Arminian systems have been already exhibited. We are now to shew the agreement between these and the modern sects which are here mentioned.

1. The Methodists appear to maintain, that before a person is brought into a state of justification, he can perform works which are good and acceptable to God, which good works he does in order to his justification. In their platform, it is said, "We have received it as a maxim, that man is to do nothing in order to justification. Nothing can be more false. Whoever desires to find favor with God, must cease to do evil, and learn to do well. Who-

ever repents, must do works meet for repentance ; and if this is not in order to find favor, what does he do them for?"—Again, it is said, "God usually gives men a considerable time to receive light, to grow in Grace, to do and suffer his will, before they are either justified or sanctified."

Of the same import is that article of the Semi-Pelagian system mentioned before,* that a man, before he receives Grace, is capable of faith and holy desires. It likewise corresponds with the Pelagian doctrine, that works, done by the creature, are "the condition of salvation." The Church of Rome maintained the same sentiment, as may be seen by one of the decrees of the council of Trent, before quoted.†

2. Another sentiment, common to Methodists and Free-willers, is, that conversion "ultimately depends on the co-operation of obedient free-will with external means, and the influences of the Spirit." They sometimes assert things which appear inconsistent with this ; and they are unwilling to admit all its consequences. They often speak about the necessity of divine influence upon the heart ; but this will be the result of their explanations, that it depends on something in mankind, independent of any special influence, whether they will comply with, or reject, the Gospel.—Compare this with the Pelagian system. One article of the Semi-Pelagian doctrine is, that

* Chap. 7.

† Chap. 8.

“man, born free, is consequently capable of resisting the influences of Grace, or complying with its suggestions.”—The Pelagians expressed their views on this article, thus: “External Grace is necessary to excite the endeavors of men; but they have no need of the internal succors of the Spirit.”—By external Grace, it is presumed they intended motives and persuasion, and those outward calls which are given to all who have opportunity to hear the word. Though Methodists and Free-willers speak of the influences of the Spirit; yet, according to their plan, the efficacy of this divine influence amounts to no more than the Pelagians allowed: for they deny any special influence, which is imparted to one person more than to another: Consequently the reason why one person differs from another, exists within himself. He has made himself to differ, by complying with a call which was equally given to others.—The Arminian doctrine, which has been before exhibited,* corresponds with this. They maintain, that “in the conversion of a sinner, there is no such thing as irresistible Grace;” that is, there is no influence exercised upon him, but such as he may resist and render ineffectual. They further speak of a self-determining power in the creature, either to comply with, or render ineffectual, the influences of the Spirit.—In perfect agreement with this, is the doctrine of the Quakers. They believe that there is, in every person, a degree of saving light, which

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* Chap. 9.

needs only to be cultivated and cherished, by contemplation and withdrawal from carnal allurements, to grow to perfection, and issue in eternal life.

3. Methodists and Free-willers, together with Quakers, deny "an eternal, unchangeable purpose of God, to make the Gospel effectual to the salvation of a particular part of mankind." They suppose that "God chose believers to salvation, upon a foreknowledge of their faith and obedience;" therefore, faith and holiness, upon their plan, are not the consequence of election, but election is the consequence of faith and holiness. This is consistent with their views respecting conversion, and the application of the redemption wrought by Christ: for if these depend not upon an effectual influence of the Spirit of God, but upon the will of the creature, it is manifest that God did not, by an absolute decree, choose any to salvation: for he must first see who would use their free will to believe the Gospel, and live holy lives, in order that there might be a foundation for his purpose and determination.

The Semi-Pelagian and Arminian systems are in exact agreement with this.—The former believed, "that God did not dispense his Grace to one, more than to another, in consequence of election." The latter maintained, "that God did not fix the future condition of mankind, by an absolute, unconditional decree; but determined to bestow salvation on

those who he foresaw would persevere in the faith."

4. Election, and the certain perseverance of believers, are necessarily connected. Those whom God has chosen to life, he will of course keep by his power, through faith, unto salvation. Respecting this, the Methodists say, that those "who live by faith on the Son of God, and who are sanctified by the blood of the covenant, may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish." The Quakers and Free-will Baptists adopt the same belief respecting perseverance.

It is uncertain what were the views of the Pelagians on this article, though from their general system it is probable they adopted the opinion that believers may fall from the divine favor, and perish. The views of Arminians, respecting this doctrine, are better known. They maintained, that "those who are united to Christ by faith, may fall from that faith, and finally forfeit their state of Grace."—The sentiments which these modern sects have adopted, respecting Christian perfection, and the ground of evangelical love, with some other peculiarities, will be omitted. Those doctrines only are exhibited, which determine their views of the Gospel as a dispensation of Grace, and especially the ground of a sinner's acceptance with God.

While modern Heresies are within our view, it may be observed, that if we except

the Socinians, none of them have a more direct tendency to destroy the moral effects of the Gospel, than those who are called Universalists. Among the ancients, and after the Reformation, a few individuals denied the eternity of future punishments; but lately this sentiment has prevailed to a great extent. It is peculiarly suited to quiet the fears of the profligate, of those who have nothing to hope on the ground of reconciliation to God. It has a charm, by which it insinuates itself into the minds of the dissolute, with a secret influence. Of many it may rather be said, that they wish such a doctrine may prove true, than that they have confidence in its truth. Its danger appears in this, that in a great measure it destroys the sanctions of the divine law, removes that apprehension of the wrath to come which awakens sinners from slumber: Of course it gives to them an occasion to rest secure, and cry peace to themselves, without any moral fitness for Heaven. It composes the soul in a state of security, which is an awful presage of destruction. It is one of the refuges of guilt.—The moral tendency of this sentiment is witnessed, where-ever it prevails to any considerable extent. It opens the avenue to every vice. Those, whom nothing but the fear of eternal destruction can restrain from the greatest excess, will overleap every other restraint, when this is taken away; and we find, in proportion to the confidence which men have in this opinion, they become indifferent about religion, and indulge a carnal and selfish inclination.

As it is our object to exhibit those systems of doctrine which respect the ground of a sinner's acceptance with God, we shall not enter into a discussion of the Universal system.— We see that there is no material difference in those systems of doctrine which we have compared. That of the Pelagians was revived by the Arminians and Quakers. The same is again revived by Methodists and Free-will Baptists. They are in effect the same, because they rest on the same basis, and meet in the same point. They all allow the same place and degree of efficacy to divine influence in their system; and agreeing in this, there will be of course an agreement in all the leading articles of their belief. Let this question be stated, How far is our salvation to be ascribed to the free Grace of God? and the answer to this will determine what our views are, on every essential doctrine of the Gospel.

CHAP. X.

In what respect, and how far, do those systems of doctrine, which have been exhibited, come within the general description of Heresy?

WE have now exhibited those systems of doctrine, which, at different periods of the Christian Church, have appeared, and proved

occasions of most unhappy dissensions and divisions among professors of Christianity. We have seen how these different schemes were viewed and treated by Christians in general at the time when they were first divulged. This has unavoidably led to a detail of opinions and events, which has been attended with considerable labor, and which will not perhaps be very interesting to readers in general. The subject is now brought within a smaller compass.—We have these doctrines before us. They are exhibited, in the order of time when they first appeared. They are compared, one with another, that we may see their resemblance and relation. It has been an object to bring together those systems which are alike in their fundamental principles, in order that we may have them before us in one point of view. In this connection, we may compare them with the Gospel: and the reader will judge, whether any or all of them come within the general description of Heresy which was stated in the first chapter.

Let us consider that governing point in which they differ from the Calvinistic system of doctrine: and it is conceived that the difference consists in the different place which they respectively assign to divine influence in the salvation of a sinner. If men disagree on this point, it is presumed that they will not meet in any important doctrine. We have supposed, that the general spirit of the Calvinistic system may be expressed in this simple

proposition, Our salvation is wholly of God. If this proposition be admitted, in all its extent, those doctrines which constitute this scheme, will be its natural consequences. The other systems which have been exhibited, and compared together, do in effect suppose this, that the work of salvation depends in a great measure on the creature's choice.

Keeping in our view this point of difference, and it is a very essential point, we are now to compare these doctrines, not only with the opinions of men in the purest ages, but with the Scriptures, which contain the only unerring standard of truth.

The Unitarian system first demands our attention. In this we shall include both the Arian and Socinian doctrines. This first requires our consideration; because it is a more manifest rejection of the doctrines of Grace, in every degree, than the others which have been exhibited. Let us compare this with the Gospel, as a dispensation of Grace.

We have seen, that this doctrine appeared in the earliest ages of Christianity. It was the doctrine of the Ebionites, who, it appears, were not accounted Christians by the primitive fathers of the Church. When Gentiles, who professed to receive the Christian faith, adopted this system, they were considered as apostates from the truth. The proof of this arises, not only from the writings of those who undertook to exhibit the faith of the Church at that

time ; but a more incontestible evidence results from the conduct of the Churches. They excluded Unitarians from their fellowship. Facts, of this nature, afford more unequivocal proof than a thousand declarations, that they viewed those persons as Heretics, who denied the Lord that bought them. When Churches excommunicate persons on account of the sentiments which they adopt, it must be supposed they act on the principle that such sentiments are a perversion of the Gospel, and an indication that the heart is alienated from God.

In relation to this subject, it will be of no consequence what were the opinions of mankind in those times of darkness which preceded the Reformation. After the Reformation, we have considered the revival of this doctrine, and that it was condemned, as Heresy, by the general voice of Christians. Articles of faith, and decisions of councils, furnish proof that this system was entirely different from the general faith of the reformed Church.—Unitarians were separated from the body of believers, and considered as aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.

The fathers of New-England were Trinitarians. They received the doctrines of the Reformation ; and it was, in no small degree, for the maintenance and enjoyment of these doctrines, that they encountered the danger and hardship of settling a new country.—But why is there so much said respecting the faith of primitive Christians, of the reformers, and

the first settlers of New-England? They were fallible men; and it is possible that they might agree in error. Beside, it will be said, we are not required to follow the faith of men. This is already admitted. The appeal must be made to the law and to the testimony: and if the faith of the reformers do not correspond with the real design of the Gospel, we are bound to reject it.

The Unitarian doctrine, considered as an error, might be less pernicious in its consequences, than in reality it is, if it were nothing more than a mistaken conception respecting the character of Christ. But we ought to view it in connection with its consequences; and consider, that the Unitarian, in denying the divinity of Christ, rejects an atonement. He strips the Gospel of its principal glory, the glory of exhibiting an effectual and safe way for the reinstatement of those in the favor of God, who have forfeited his favor and ruined themselves. The Socinian supposes, that Jesus Christ was a Prophet, who was sent to instruct mankind, and to enforce his instructions by his example. He supposes, that the death of Christ was a confirmation of the testimony which he gave; but that it has not procured redemption. His faith, therefore, has nothing in it essentially different from the assent which we give to the testimony of a credible man.—If it be inquired, On what condition he hopes to obtain eternal salvation? the answer is obvious and unavoidable, that he must accomplish it wholly of himself. On his system, he excludes every other

way. He must perform an obedience which will merit eternal life : therefore, on his plan, the Gospel is different, in its whole structure, from that which a Trinitarian receives.

The question may now be considered as resting on this point : Is the Gospel, in any respect, a dispensation of Grace ? Does it offer salvation, as the effect of divine mercy, through the redemption that is in Christ ? If these inquiries are to be answered in the affirmative, the consequence must appear plain, that the Unitarian doctrine is a Heresy, most pernicious in its tendency : for according to the common acceptation of the term Grace, it is excluded on this system. It is an inquiry of serious moment, whether those who have adopted this, and who persevere in it, do not exclude themselves from the benefits of the Gospel covenant ? Is it necessary, in order to prove the Gospel to be a dispensation of Grace, which offers salvation on the ground of an atonement, that we should recapitulate those declarations of Scripture which directly assert or imply this truth ? If we look to the Old Testament, we find a worship, instituted of God, which, in its whole structure, implies the necessity of an atonement. We find ceremonies, of divine appointment, which can have neither efficacy nor meaning, unless they respect an atonement for sin. The sacrifices, which the Jewish Church offered, pointed to that Savior, who, in the fulness of time, was to put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself : and their whole efficacy was derived from this perfect sacrifice.

St. Paul instructed the Hebrews to consider the sacrifices which their forefathers had offered, according to divine appointment, as the shadow only, of good things to come; and that they were effectual, on account of their typical relation to that sacrifice which was offered on the cross. He told them, it was not possible for the blood of bulls, and of goats, to take away sin. These institutions were adapted to raise an expectation in the minds of that people, of a sacrifice which would be effectual to take away the guilt of sin.

A very considerable part of those messages, which the Prophets delivered, were designed to prepare the Church for the coming of the Messiah: and they taught the people of Israel to look for deliverance from sin, through his atoning blood. And this is the name whereby he shall be called, the LORD our righteousness.*—They announced him, wounded for the transgressions, bruised for the iniquities chastised for the peace, and stricken for the healing, of his people. He is represented as the substitute for sinners. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.†

If we look to the New Testament, the necessity of an atonement, to remove the guilt of sin, and open the way for offenders into the kingdom of Heaven, is made more abundantly evident. For once, let us suppose the Gospel

* Jere. xxiii. 6.

† Isaiah li. 6.

revealed to rational beings, who are capable of understanding the meaning of human language, though not of the human race, nor interested in any other way than as spectators in the transactions between God and man; and let it be further supposed, that these beings are wholly ignorant of the moral condition of mankind, until they see it described in the Gospel: Let the Gospel be committed to their inspection; and is it not probable, that they would see, in it, something more than a collection of moral precepts? Would they not discern a plan, different from those human compositions which only furnish rules for the regulation of conduct? Would not such beings, no way interested in the controversy between God and man, perceive that the Gospel is addressed to mankind, or a fallen and ruined part of God's dominion, already under condemnation; and that, without some divine interposition for their deliverance, they must be lost? Would they not discover in the Gospel, a plan laid and executed for the express purpose of raising up fallen creatures, to that character and to those blessings, which they have forfeited by sin? And further, that this plan is so contrived and guarded by infinite wisdom, that while pardon and everlasting life are bestowed on those who deserve death, no injury is done to the governing justice of God: for justice is satisfied, and the divine abhorrence of sin is fully expressed in the sufferings of the Savior.— They would receive such impressions, from the general tenor of the Gospel. Every doubt, however, would be removed, when they should

read that the Son of God was manifested to take away sin, and destroy the works of the devil : and that those who are saved, are justified freely by Grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare, or manifest, his righteousness, for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.* Although much ingenuity is requisite, to evade the meaning of such language, yet all that is necessary to find the meaning of the inspired writer, is a disposition to know and receive the truth. By this declaration of the inspired Apostle, the honest inquirer will see that mankind are to be saved, not on account of any thing in them, to merit salvation ; but by divine Grace.—But how is this Grace manifested ? Not that God will pass over sin, and receive the sinner into his favor, without some satisfaction, which will secure the integrity of his justice : for if God should give up his justice, he would not be manifested as the righteous Governor of the world. In this appears the plan which was laid for the honorable exercise of mercy. God hath set forth his Son to be a propitiation for sin, to declare, to make manifest, his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. By virtue of this satisfaction, he is manifested to be a just and righteous Governor, while he treats the sinner as a just person.

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* Rom. iii. 24, 25.

How are the benefits of this redemption applied to the sinner? Through faith in his (the Savior's) blood; or through faith in the efficacy of his blood, to take away sin. Is it possible, that the faith here mentioned can mean a confidence in the efficacy of a creature's blood, to satisfy infinite justice, and atone for the sins of other creatures? The supposition cannot be admitted, even on principles of common sense.

When an impartial observer of the transactions between God and man, reads that it is the blood of Christ which cleanseth from sin, he will naturally conclude that sin has brought a stain upon the human race, which must be washed away, before they can be objects of divine favor; that they must be restored to the favor which they have lost, by a divine influence; and that the blood of Christ is the only meritorious cause of salvation.

When he reads these declarations of Scripture to the effect, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law; ye are bought with a price; redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of the Son of God;" he will naturally conclude that mankind, by nature, are lost; that they have become servants of sin, and heirs of misery; and that those who are made heirs of salvation, are ransomed from sin, by the blood of Christ. He will conclude, moreover, that believers become the property of him who has redeemed them. Whether this last conclu-

sion should occur to the supposed uninterested being, or not, we are sure it did not escape St. Paul ; and he improved it as an argument to influence believers to live unto him who died for them, " Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." Are believers then redeemed by the blood of a creature ? To suppose that the blood of a creature can be effectual to ransom other creatures from the powers of darkness, and from the curse of the law, involves an absurdity ; for it implies, that the ransomed have become the property of a creature, and are under obligation to live to a creature's glory. Then God must relinquish the claim which originally he had on our supreme affection and service : for, on this principle, if we are believers, we are no longer his. ~~For such a supposition do not rob the Master~~ High of the honor which is due to him, it is difficult to conceive of any thing that will.

Again, reconciliation presupposes a state of enmity. The Apostle therefore speaks of believers as being once alienated and enemies ; but now reconciled to God, by the death of his Son. The Gospel is called the Word of reconciliation ; and why ? Doubtless because it exhibits Jesus Christ as the propitiation for sin. The inspired Apostle leaves us at no loss how this reconciliation is effected ; for he (that is, Jesus Christ) hath *made peace through the blood of the cross*. He then applies this truth immediately to the state of believers, " And you who were sometimes alienated, and enemies, in your minds, by wicked works, yet

now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouable in his sight."*

Let common sense, as well as Scripture, decide, if the death of a creature can be such a propitiation as will magnify a perfect law, and make it honorable, and restore enemies to the favor of God.

But if, to an impartial spectator, not personally interested in the controversy between God and sinners of the human race, it would appear so manifest, that the just become so through the merit of Christ's atoning blood, and that only, it may be asked, why does it not appear equally plain to an Unitarian? Undoubtedly there is a reason why the Gospel appears so exceedingly different, to persons of different views.

It is no greater wonder now, than it was in the Apostles time, that some should be found who reject the counsel of God, against themselves; and who, continuing voluntarily ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own, refuse to submit themselves to the righteousness of God. Multitudes of the human race have plainly discovered, from the Scriptures, that a divine Savior has appeared in the flesh, to put away sin, by the sacrifice which he offered on the cross: and, under an affecting sense of their guilt,

* Col. i. 21, 22.

and apprehension of danger, they have found a remedy in this truth, which they could nowhere else find. It has been their only consolation, that a competent Person has undertaken to make satisfaction, and open a way for their reinstatement in the forfeited favor of God.

It is certain, that the Gospel, as received by Socinians, is materially different from that which the Trinitarians suppose to be God's message of Grace to a guilty world. One of these descriptions of people undoubtedly disown the true import of Christ's word; and we need not deem it surprizing, that some should reject the truth, and believe a lie. We need be at no loss respecting the cause, when the Savior has so distinctly stated the reason why the Jews, his countrymen, according to the flesh, refused to receive the truth. "He that is of God, heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."*

Without multiplying particular texts to shew the inconsistency of the Unitarian plan with the Gospel, one more will be mentioned, for the sake of an important inquiry which it involves. Whether the Lamb, that was slain from the foundation of the world, be considered worthy of religious worship here on earth, or not, it is certain, that in Heaven he receives supreme adoration. "The four beasts, (that is, living creatures) and the four and twenty elders, fell

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* John viii. 47.

down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps and golden vials, full of odors, which are the prayers of saints: And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and *hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.** Such being the worship of saints in Heaven, it is an inquiry of the greatest moment to every one, whether we have that interest in the blood of the Lamb, and that temper of heart which will prepare us to unite in this worship? Respecting Unitarians, the inquiry becomes of a more serious nature: for does not their plan of doctrine necessarily exclude them from such acts of heavenly worship? Do they not count the blood of the covenant, by which believers are redeemed and sanctified, as an unholy or common thing?

In a word, if the prayers of saints, contained in the vials, breathe this spirit, "Thou art worthy, for thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood;" have those persons any interest in these prayers, who deny the divinity and reject the atonement of Christ?

SECTION II.

HAVING briefly considered the Unitarian system of doctrine, and compared it with the Gospel, as a dispensation of Grace, those other plans, which have been exhibited, now demand our attention. It has been stated, that the doctrines of the Wesleyan Methodists and

* Rev. v. 8, 9.

Free-willers, are not new. In them, we see a revival of the Semi-Pelagian system which appeared in the fifth century ; and of the Arminian, which arose in the seventeenth. Not long after the Reformation took place in England, a few societies separated from the English Church, according to the account of Strype, and set up an independent system of worship. " They were called Free-willers, or Free-will men." They rejected the doctrines of the Reformation, and adopted a system substantially the same with that which is now maintained by Methodists and Free-willers.* Comparing these systems together, we find they correspond so nearly in their general principles, that we feel justified in considering them not as distinct systems, but one and the same plan of doctrine. They allow the same degree of importance and efficacy to divine influence and Grace, in the salvation of a sinner ; and we repeat the assertion, that the religious sentiments of a person will be according to his views of the necessity of divine influence. In other words, according to the place which a system of religion allows to divine influence, so will be its whole structure. Some of the before mentioned denominations have used terms which give to their opinions a more evangelical and orthodox appearance than others. The Semi-Pelagians seemed to ascribe more to divine influence than Pelagians, and they apparently admit of Grace in the salvation of men ; yet by supposing that " a sinner,

* See Chap ix. Sec. 2.

before he receives Grace, is capable of faith and holy desires," they did, in effect, deny the necessity of divine influence upon the heart. The Methodists and Free-willers appear to have made a still greater effort to frame a system which will carry an evangelical appearance, without really yielding any thing more to the necessity and efficacy of Grace, than the Semi-Pelagians and Arminians.

Respecting the doctrines now under consideration, the writer of these remarks feels the necessity of candor and caution; and though he cannot be well understood, without using those names which have been applied to persons who adopt these sentiments, yet he would be sorry to have it thought, that he intends, by the use of these names, to fix a reproach on any denomination of Christians. He believes that there is a radical error in the system; but as a persevering and obstinate Heretic is excluded, by express declaration of Scripture, from the kingdom of Heaven, and as such is to be treated, by saints on earth, as an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, it would betray a want of candor, to include, in the class of Heretics, all those who have adopted those doctrines.—He will not only say that he hopes, but that he believes, there are among the denominations which are here brought into view, many real friends to Christ. He is ready to admit, that the preaching of Methodists, and others of the same system, has sometimes been made the means to awaken the careless, and lead people to a serious inquiry respecting

their state in relation to eternity. He believes, with others, that among these denominations there are many pious people, who have not attended to the point of distinction between these doctrines and the orthodox scheme of Grace, and who are not fully apprized of the consequences which result from them. The reader will recur to an opinion which was offered in the first chapter, respecting the general principle by which Heresy may be known.—Not every material error will constitute that Heresy which destroys the soul. Persons may be placed in such circumstances; that the truth is concealed from them; and therefore they may receive error, when they are not, in heart, opposed to the truth. The disposition of the heart must be taken into consideration, in determining the character of a Heretic. He who obstinately adheres to an essential error after he has had the opportunity and means to know its nature and tendency, and rejects the truth because he is not reconciled to it, may be called a Heretic. Light has come into the world. Its salutary rays have been reflected upon him; but through the bias of an evil heart, he deliberately chooses darkness rather than light.

On the supposition, therefore, that the system of doctrine which we are now to consider, is a departure from the spirit of the Gospel, in an essential point, it will not follow, as a certain consequence, that all who adopt this system, are excluded from the benefits of the Gospel covenant: for we cannot prove, and

we would by no means suppose, that all who have received such sentiments, have been governed, in their choice, by a corrupt heart.

In correspondence with the plan which we have pursued, two points are now to be considered. First, were these doctrines accounted Heresy when they first appeared? And secondly, are they consistent with the Gospel as a dispensation of Grace?

In the prosecution of these inquiries, we have been led to notice periods in which the Christian Church was more pure than common in this imperfect state; not to say she has been, at such times, more pure as it respects the doctrines which she has received; ~~for this would be considered as taking for~~
~~for this would be considered as taking for~~
granted the point that is to be proved. By times of spiritual purity, is intended, those seasons of special attention to religion, when the minds of people have in general been awakened from long slumber, and prompted to a diligent and prayerful inquiry after the truth; and when, in their daily conversation, they have exemplified that "godly sincerity," which a deep sense of the reality and importance of Gospel truth is calculated to beget.

Such were the times which followed the preaching of Christ and his Apostles. Such was the time of the Reformation, at the beginning of the sixteenth century: And the rise of the Puritans in England, whose descendants instituted the New-England Churches, may be

considered as another distinct revival of evangelical religion.

So far as human opinions have weight, the doctrines which men receive, at such times, claim our attention and respect. If we go any where, aside from the Bible, with the hope that we shall find the truth, we shall doubtless have the greatest confidence in those who appear to feel the power of religion.

In the three first centuries, we cannot so precisely ascertain the views of Christians respecting the doctrines under consideration, as in later times : for the primitive fathers were not much engaged in controversy on these subjects.

When Pelagius made known his doctrines, they were considered as a dangerous Heresy. The opinions of this man were different from those doctrines which had been conveyed down from the Apostles. At this time, the Church had fallen far below the purity of the apostolic age ; and it might of course be expected, that very many were pre-disposed to fall in with doctrines of a corrupt nature and tendency, when they should be exhibited. The Semi-Pelagian system, in appearance, admitted the necessity of divine influence. This was more popular. It was, at least, thought more prudent, by those who were unfriendly to the doctrines of Grace, to embrace this system, than that of Pelagius. This, however, was accounted a Heresy, by a great part of

the Churches ; yet those times of darkness soon followed, when almost every thing, pertaining to the simplicity and purity of the Gospel, was prostrated.

Those who, in the sixteenth century, began the Reformation, maintained that the salvation of a sinner, in every stage, is the effect of divine Grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ; and that there is nothing independently in the sinner, which has a tendency to his conversion and fitness for Heaven. From the exposition of the doctrines of the Catholic Church, and the decisions of the council of Trent, and also from the dispute between Luther and Eckius, it appears that the doctrines of Grace constituted one cause of separation from the Church of Rome. The reformers maintained, to their full extent, these doctrines. The Church of Rome disowned them.

In the course of this view, it has appeared, that the Free-will plan of doctrine was a departure from the system of the reformers. Soon after the Reformation, a few societies were constituted in England on this plan ; and in Holland, it was revived by Arminius, about fifty years after the Reformation. This system was condemned as a Heresy soon after its first appearance : and those who adhered to it, were supposed to have forfeited the character and privileges of Christians.

In the reign of Charles I. but especially after the restoration of Charles II. the Ar-

minian system of doctrine prevailed in England. At the same time a great degree of profligacy and vice prevailed among all ranks of people.—The doctrines of the Reformation were retained by the Puritans, and brought by them to this country. When the Arminian doctrine had become the religion of the kingdom, and the simple and pure manners of the Reformation were succeeded by dissipation, the Puritans became very odious. They were impelled, in some measure, by reproach, and by Ecclesiastical oppression, to seek a refuge in the wilderness of New-England. The first settlers of these New-England states were Calvinists; or in other words, they received the doctrines of the Reformation, as they are exhibited in the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England, and in the Assembly's Catechism.

From the whole, we feel justified in the conclusion, that those who have adopted the system which is now under consideration, have been the dissenters from that doctrine which has prevailed in the purest ages, and which was transmitted down from the Apostles and primitive Christians through successive periods.

SECTION III.

WE are now to consider, in the second place, whether the system of doctrine, which has been adopted in general by the Pelagians

and Arminians, and revived by Methodists and Free-willers, be consistent with the Gospel as a dispensation of Grace? It has been already stated, that the difference, between the Calvinistic system of doctrine, and that under consideration, consists in the different degree of necessity and importance which they ascribe to divine influence, in the salvation of a sinner. The former maintains, that a saint is made to differ from a sinner, by an effectual influence of the Spirit, which has subdued the alienation of his will, called him out of darkness into God's marvellous light, and made him willing to choose life : the latter does, in effect, suppose that the reason why a sinner differs from a saint, exists wholly within himself. By a self-determining power in his will, or by a better use of his free will, he has chosen that way of life which a sinner does not choose ; and therefore he has made himself to differ from a sinner. By a little observation, we shall see how this difference, in regard to divine influence, runs into every essential doctrine of the Christian dispensation.

Because those of the Methodist or Free-will plan suppose, that the conversion of a sinner depends on the better use which he has made of free will than other sinners have done, they reject the doctrines of divine sovereignty, effectual calling, election, and the certain perseverance of all believers.—The point of difference is not, that free agency is maintained on one plan and denied on the other. It

is not, that Methodists and Free-willers suppose that mankind, whether saints or sinners, are free in their choice ; and that Calvinists suppose they are not free : for this freedom of the will is maintained on the Calvinistic as strongly as on the Free-will plan. No one disputes, that when a sinner chooses life, he acts freely. But we must determine what that freedom is which constitutes moral agency. We speak without any definite meaning when we use such terms as freedom of choice ; for these are synonymous. Choice is freedom ; and were we to pursue our inquiries at ever so great length, in regard to the nature of freedom, we can make nothing more of it, than choice. We enjoy all the freedom which intelligent beings can have, when we are allowed to choose, and have that which best agrees with the moral relish of our heart.— This is the case in natural things. When different kinds of food are set before a person, and one kind is better suited to his taste than another, he will have a choice. If it be asked, what is necessary in order that he may act freely ? it is a clear case, that he is free when he is allowed to take that which is most agreeable to him ; and the reason is obvious, for in that case, he has his choice. It is also equally evident, that he is not so free when he is compelled to take that which is not agreeable to him, or which is not his choice.

Were the writer of these remarks competent, he has not a disposition, in this familiar view of religious opinions, to enter upon a

metaphysical discussion respecting the nature of freedom ; especially when he can give his view of it in three words, as clearly as in three thousand : It is choice.

Without metaphysical discrimination, this, in spiritual things, appears to be the plain idea of freedom. Saints and sinners, though very different in their governing principles, and though their choice fall on different objects, are nevertheless equally free, for the reason that is stated before : They both have their choice. When holiness and sin are presented to them, or in the language of Scripture, when life and death are set before them, they are called upon to choose. They will choose that course which is most agreeable to their moral relish ; and when they do so, it is clearly evident, that they are free, and accountable for the consequences of their choice.—Saints choose holiness, because they love it. For the same reason, sinners choose to live in a course of sin : It is most agreeable to the moral relish of their hearts. Both are free ; because both choose that kind of life which is most agreeable to them. But while men are under the power of sin, that is, while sin is their choice, and they are consequently opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, it implies a contradiction to suppose they can choose holiness, or believe and obey the Gospel. It supposes that they can choose that which is, at the very time, contrary to their choice : yet this appears to be the freedom for which Methodists and Free-willers contend.

The benefits of redemption are offered to two sinners, who, at the time when the offer is made, are opposed to the terms of reconciliation ; for if they be not opposed to these terms, they are not sinners. On the plan of doctrine which we are considering, it must be said, if one comply with the invitation, and the other reject it, that he who accepts the offer, differs from the other, because his obedient free will co-operated with those common influences, which were afforded, in equal measure, to him who rejects the offer. Accordingly, he must have had a degree of holiness, before he complied with the proposed terms of reconciliation ; which is contrary to the supposition : or in order to act freely, men must have power to choose that to which they are naturally opposed ; which is repugnant to the nature of freedom.—Again, the point in dispute is not, whether mankind have natural power to obey God's commands. This is admitted, by Calvinists as well as Methodists. The latter contend, that men have a power of themselves to believe and obey the Gospel ; and it appears to be the spirit of their system, that this power, aided by the common influences of the Spirit, is the cause of their becoming believers.

We cannot conceive of more than two kinds of power in man. One is, a natural power, or the ability which they have to render a reasonable service to their Maker : the other is, a moral power, or will, or disposition of heart,

to comply with God's requirements. Respecting the first, or a natural power, there is no dispute between Calvinists and Methodists. It will be admitted by all, that, in this respect, God requires nothing of his creatures above their ability to perform. To little purpose, however, has a sinner natural ability to know and serve God, if he have not a disposition. So long as he remains without this disposition, he will not comply with the Gospel call. It is contrary to the nature of liberty, that he should believe and obey the Gospel while his heart is opposed to its terms. It involves the absurdity, and indeed impossibility, which was observed before, that he chooses something, which, at the very time, is contrary to his choice. As there are but two kinds of power in man, natural and moral ; and as Calvinists and Methodists both admit that sinners have ■ natural power to do all which is required of them ; it follows, that when the latter contend that sinners have power, of themselves, to believe and obey the Gospel, they mean a moral power, or will. On this plan they contend, that those who believe, have made a better use of their free will, than those who reject the Gospel : They complied with an invitation, with which the other did not choose to comply : and this is the ground of difference between the believer and the unbeliever. We cannot conceive what better use the saint has made of his free will, than the sinner, unless we suppose he was willing to comply with the Gospel before he was a believer, and that the other was unwilling. The difference, there-

fore, between the two systems of doctrine, amounts to this : The Free-will plan supposes, that sinners, or at least those who once were sinners, and have now become saints, were naturally willing, or had a disposition, to believe and obey the Gospel. The Calvinistic system supposes, that they were unwilling ; and that this want of disposition to know God, and obey the Gospel of his Son, is, at once, their inability and criminality. It is undoubtedly criminal, if opposition to the greatest and best of Beings, and to the most reasonable commands, be so ; and it is certainly the only inability or impediment which prevents a sinner from complying with the Gospel, and enjoying its benefits. Take away this indisposition, and admit that he has a will which co-operates with the external calls of the Gospel and the common influences of the Spirit, and he will choose salvation, for a very obvious reason : He is no longer a sinner, but a saint. On this plan, therefore, he is a saint, without any other influence than that which is given alike to all : and further, if all men have, by nature, this will or disposition to comply with the Gospel, it follows that all men are saints. A will, to comply with the Gospel invitation, is faith : a will, to live a holy life, is holiness : a will, to obey God's commands, is obedience : For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. If men be prevented by any natural impediment, or inability, from their duty, it will not be imputed to them as sin.

If men have, by nature, a self-determining power of will, or a will that is obedient to comply with the outward calls of the Gospel, and the common influences of the Spirit, it is difficult to conceive what they need more in order to be saints. This, it seems, is one step, and a very important one, towards their salvation which is not the work of God.

Lét us now inquire, if it do not appear, from the Gospel, that sinners are naturally unwilling to comply with the terms of life, and that this indisposition be their blamable inability?

Pride is one of the causes which prevent sinners from complying with the humiliating terms of the Gospel. "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek; God is not in all his thoughts."* It is said, the wicked have means to obtain true wisdom; but no heart, or disposition, to improve them: but this could not be applied to all men, if there be any who have a moral power or disposition to believe and obey the Gospel. Were this the case, the inquiry of the wise man has no definite meaning: "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?"† Again, it is said that not one among men is found who naturally seeketh after God.—"The Lord looked down from Heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did un-

* Ps. x. 4.

† Prov. xvii. 16.

derstand, and seek God : they are all gone aside ; they are altogether become filthy ; there is none that doeth good, no not one.”* “ The heart of the sons of men is full of evil ; and madness is in their heart, while they live.”† —These passages of inspiration prove, that in all men there is an aversion of heart to every thing which is good ; and that it is as much beyond the power of a creature to change this disposition to evil, and give it a new direction, as for the Ethiopian to change his skin : “ Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots ? then may ye also, who are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well.”‡

St. Paul tells us, that the heathen might have known God, from his works ; and the cause of their ignorance, in this respect, was a want of disposition or will to become acquainted with him : “ They did not like to retain him in their knowledge.”§ The same Apostle has observed, that those who are unrenewed, by Grace, have an aversion of heart to spiritual things ; and on this account, they do not receive them : “ But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”|| “ The carnal mind is enmity against God ; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”** A greater than Paul has said, that sinners are naturally unwilling to comply with the terms of life : “ And

* Ps. xiv. 2, 3.

§ Rom. i. 28.

† Ecclesi. ix. 3.

|| 1 Cor. ii. 14.

‡ Jer. xiii. 23.

** Rom. viii. 7.

ye will not (or ye are unwilling to) come to me, that ye might have life."* "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men *loved* darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."† According to these declarations of our Savior, it is very evident, that an aversion of heart to the light of the Gospel truth, and unwillingness to come to this light, constitute the criminal inability of sinners : for *this is their condemnation.*

The reader will readily see the point of distinction. Calvinists suppose, that though sinners have natural power to do all which is required of them, a price is put into their hands to get wisdom ; talents are committed to them, and they are only required to improve such talents as they have ; but they are unwilling to comply with the Gospel invitation : and they will continue so until, by a special influence of the Holy Ghost, the moral relish of their heart is changed. Their salvation is therefore wholly of God. It is he who worketh in them both to will and to do. In a word, when they are made willing to comply with the Gospel, they are no longer sinners, but saints.

The other system of doctrine under consideration, maintains, in effect, that sinners are willing to believe and obey the truth, without any special influence to change the bias of their will. Perhaps they will not admit this conse-

* John v. 40.

† John iii. 19.

quence, in the words which we have here stated; but we have seen, that this consequence unavoidably results from their system. Is there any peculiar manifestation of Grace, in influencing men to comply with terms, with which they are previously willing to comply?

It was a covenant promise made to Christ, that his people should be willing in the day of his power. This promise points out distinctly those effects which would be produced by Christ's power. It would make his people *willing*. Willing to do what? Doubtless to comply with the Gospel invitation, and do their duty. It is obviously implied in this promise, that sinners are naturally unwilling to come to Christ for salvation; that this is their inability; and that they will continue to be unwilling, until their wills are changed by the power of Christ.—This passage is alone sufficient to prove, that a special influence, from above, is necessary to influence sinners to choose life.

SECTION IV.

IN the former section, this conclusion was considered as resulting from the system under consideration, that there is a very important step in the salvation of a sinner, which is not the work of God. We are now to inquire, whether the Gospel be a dispensation of Grace? Does it propose salvation, as the effect of divine Grace, through the redemption that is in Christ? If it do, we must conclude, that the

system under consideration is erroneous, in a very essential respect. Instead of excluding, it lays a foundation for boasting, by leading the sinner to suppose, that his reconciliation, in the first and most important stage of it, depends upon something within himself.

In the reconciliation of a sinner, God claims to himself all the glory. The justice and propriety of this claim, arise from the consideration that it is his work: "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake."*

St. Paul assures us, that the law of faith, or the Gospel which he exhibited, excludes boasting. It is not difficult to ascertain how boasting is excluded by that system of doctrine which he taught. He removed every occasion of this kind, by teaching sinners that their salvation is wholly of God; that he chose them, who are saved, to holiness in Christ Jesus; that he called them effectually by his Spirit, and made them accepted in the Beloved: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his purpose and Grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began."†. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."‡ Boasting is excluded, on this plan; not, indeed, by teaching sinners, that their conver-

* Isai. xliii. 25. † 2. Tim. i. 9. ‡ Tit. iii. 5.

sion, and the application of redemption to them, depend on the co-operation of their obedient free will; but that their reconciliation depends on God's purpose and Grace, manifested in their effectual calling out of darkness into his marvellous light. These are very different systems of doctrine. By one, boasting is indeed excluded; but by the other, it is confirmed.

It is unnecessary to run over the Scriptures to prove this point; and indeed one will scarcely know where to begin, and which to select among the numerous passages which will crowd upon his mind, to prove that the reconciliation of a sinner does not depend originally on his own will, but on an effectual influence of the Holy Spirit. It has not been our object to discuss particular doctrines, but rather to exhibit and try the general principles of those systems which have come under our consideration. A short analysis of one epistle of Paul, that to the Ephesians, will shew how a sinner is reconciled, brought nigh to God, and saved.

Arminians, Quakers, Methodists and Free-willers, positively deny that God has chosen any of the human race to life by an absolute decree; but only on a foresight of their faith and obedience. In the introduction of this epistle, the Apostle thanks God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us (believers) with all spiritual blessings in heav-

only places in Christ; according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. He hath blessed us, according as he hath chosen us.—Let any one consider this passage without préjudice, and will he not conclude, that all the spiritual blessings which are bestowed on believers, in which faith and holiness are included, are consequences of God's electing love? Does not the Apostle give thanks to God, that this foundation has been laid for the bestowment of spiritual blessings?

Again, it is maintained on the system which we are considering, that holiness is not the consequence, but the cause of election. The Apostle says, it is the consequence: "According as he hath chosen us, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love."—Does not this effectually obviate one popular objection which is raised against this doctrine? That if we are elected to salvation, it is no matter how we live; for in that case, we shall be saved, whether we live holy or sinful lives: or if we are not chosen to life, we shall not be saved, do what we will. The Apostle says, "believers were chosen in Christ, *that they should be holy, and without blame.*"—He again says, that God's free Grace was the cause of the believer's election. If so, it is evident, that holiness, or good works, foreseen in the creature, were not the cause: "Having predestinated us to the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to himself, *to the praise of the glory of his Grace*, wherein he hath made us

accepted in the Beloved.”—In the same chapter, he exhibits to the Ephesians, the cause of their faith. He does not give them reason to suppose, that they believed, according to a moral power, or obedient free will, in themselves; but according to that mighty power of God, which he wrought in Christ Jesus when he raised him up from the dead.

Having explained the believer's election of God, and vocation to the adoption of children, to the praise of divine Grace; in the next chapter, he reminds them of their former state. In this, he uses a figurative expression, which signifies that they were destitute, not only of holiness, or spiritual life; but of any motion, or inclination of will, to that which is spiritually good: “And you hath he quickened, or made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” In this state of spiritual death, he told them they were children of wrath, even as others. A question will arise here. If these Ephesians were, by nature, children of wrath even as others, who made them to differ from others? The Apostle does not say, that they had, of themselves, a will to comply with terms which others rejected, or because they used their free will to any better purpose than others. He answers the question in the 1st and 5th verses, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.”—He was so intent on

the theme of Grace, and solicitous that the Ephesians should consider it as the cause of all their privileges and comfort, that he falls upon this theme in an abrupt and almost untimely manner, "By Grace are ye saved." Lest they might still think that it was on account of something in them, more than there was in others, that they were brought into a state of reconciliation and favor with God, he repeats his former assertion : "By Grace are ye saved, *through faith* ; and *that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.*" As if he had said, The faith, by which you are brought into a state of favor with God, is his gift.

While Methodists say, men are to perform good works, in order to their justification, the Apostle inculcates a very different sentiment. His meaning is obvious, when he says, "believers are brought into a state of favor, *not of works, lest any man should boast* : For we are his (God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."—More of this epistle need not be exhibited, nor any further comments made on those parts which have been brought into view. The principal scope of the Apostle's argument, is to prove, that the salvation of a sinner, from the foundation to the top-stone, is of Grace : and that saints differ from sinners, not because they have made a better use of their free will than others, while they were in sin ; but by a special influence of the Holy Ghost, they were made willing to comply with the Gospel invitation.

The old objection will be reiterated, which has been perhaps thousands of times urged, that it is unreasonable to command men to do that which they have not power to perform. So long as the world lieth in wickedness, it will not be possible to silence every objection which will be raised against the terms of reconciliation. There would be weight in the objection, if sinners had not a natural power to perform their duty. It would be unreasonable indeed, to command a person to walk, who is deprived of the use of his limbs, or one who is fast bound to one spot; but we cannot prove, nor even conceive of any unreasonableness in commanding a person to do something which he has no disposition or will to perform, or in punishing him for the neglect of his duty.—In all the ordinary affairs of life, and indeed in every case, except when the sinner is required to believe and obey the Gospel, this objection vanishes. It is not thought unreasonable to require a man to provide for his family, who has become so habitually indolent and dissipated, that he has no disposition to labor; or the drunkard to refrain from his cups, although he have no disposition to refrain. This indisposition to live soberly, is considered to be his crime, and not his excuse.

Does that master, who has an obstinate and disobedient servant, think it unreasonable that he should command him to perform a piece of work, or to punish him in case of disobedience? And however the servant may complain of ill usage, yet his own conscience will

testify that the command was reasonable, and the punishment just. If we alter the case, and suppose the master has commanded the servant to do something which is beyond his natural strength, and punished him because he has not done that which he was not able to do ; all will judge that the master is unreasonable and criminal.

There can be no impropriety in making a direct appeal to the experience of Christians, to ascertain how a sinner is brought into a state of reconciliation and favor with God. If this be not an infallible criterion, yet it is worthy of every serious person's attention, who believes, that once he was afar off from God, and who hopes that he has been brought nigh, to examine how this change has been effected. Let the pious man examine himself on this subject. The inquiry is not, whether it was his choice to comply with the Gospel at the time when he first believed ? or in other words, whether he acted freely ? for this is admitted by all. The inquiry is, whether it were ever in his heart to comply with the terms of reconciliation, while he was in a state of sin ? and whether he would have been willing ever to come to Christ, if God had not called him by an effectual influence of the Holy Ghost ? Let him ask, if it were not his choice to live without Christ, when he was under the influence of sin ? If it were his choice to live without Christ, could he freely come to him, and accept the Gospel offer ? for would not

this involve the contradiction, that he could choose something which was contrary to his choice ?

Let him now ask, if he is not persuaded that it was God who made him willing to accept salvation, by forming in him a new and holy disposition of heart ? If so, let such a person answer for himself, if he is not disposed to ascribe his reconciliation, from first to last, to the distinguishing Grace of God, who chose him to life, called him, and made him accepted in the Beloved. If he have these impressions, respecting his own reconciliation, he will conclude, that there is some radical error in a system of doctrine, which does in effect ascribe the most important part of this work to the creature. If the Gospel be, in every respect, a dispensation of Grace, or if it be such that no flesh has ground to glory in the presence of God, the reason is, because the reconciliation of a sinner is wholly God's work. If there be no occasion given for boasting in this dispensation, it is because the sinner would never, of himself, have taken one step towards his reconciliation, if Christ had not made him willing in the day of his power. Very different from this, is a system which admits that the first step towards a reconciliation was taken by the sinner ; or at least, that it depended on him, without an influence of the Spirit, to change the bias and direction of his will. One of these systems admits the necessity of divine influence, in its full extent ; but the oth-

er does not. Between them there is a radical difference. If one correspond with the true spirit and import of the Gospel, it is very evident that the other is erroneous at the foundation.



CONCLUSION.

THE foregoing View of Heresies, does not embrace all the variety of denominations which have appeared, and which do still exist among mankind. It was designed to exhibit those systems of doctrine, which affect the ground of a sinner's reconciliation to God, and the degree of efficacy which is to be ascribed to divine influence, in his conversion. We have endeavored to shew how far these respective systems exclude the necessity of divine influence : and admitting the Gospel to be a dispensation of Grace, for the salvation of sinners, which all will, in general terms, admit ; the surest criterion to determine the truth or error of a system, is to ascertain in what degree it admits the necessity of divine influence.

The Unitarian plan excludes Grace in every degree, according to the usual acceptation of the term. It leaves mankind to accomplish their own salvation ; or if they fail in the important work, to lose the prize forever. This doctrine, we learn, is now prevalent in England, though directly repugnant to the spirit, and even the letter, of the established national creed. It prevails in some parts of this coun-

try ; and since those, who adopt this system, assume to themselves the exclusive character of *rational* Christians, it will probably meet with a favorable reception among a certain class of people. Although Unitarians have not an exclusive claim to this character ; yet, if they can have it believed that they are the only persons who have chosen a rational system, it will have an effect on the minds of many : for there are not a few who would rather have it supposed that they have no religion, than that they are deficient in human philosophy.

This system has been the principal subject of our animadversion, as we conceived that nothing, which is called Christianity at this day, is farther removed from the Gospel as a dispensation of Grace ; yet other systems are allied to this, in their nature and tendency, and in effect exclude the necessity of a special influence of the Holy Spirit, to renew sinners to holiness, and make them willing to accept the Gospel terms of reconciliation. It was expedient to bring these into view, that the reader may judge whether they agree with, or essentially pervert, the Gospel of Christ.

A few reflections, resulting from the foregoing view of religious opinions, will be now subjoined.

1. In the review of the subject, we may discern the evident effects of a controversy, between sinners of the human race, and their

Maker. God claims an authority over his creatures, which is absolute in its nature, and in extent unlimited. He has declared, that to him every knee shall bow, and that he will not give his name or his glory to another. Whatever may be the privileges or hopes which we enjoy, or whatever there be of moral fitness for Heaven in any, he claims it all, to the praise of the glory of his Grace. In all ages, a considerable portion of mankind have disputed this claim ; and they have resorted to a variety of schemes, to evade this unconditional surrender of themselves to God, which he requires. For this purpose, some have sought a refuge in the suggestions of infidelity, and endeavored to silence every rising fear, and erase from their minds every remaining impression of religious truth.—Others cry peace to themselves, in the delusive hope, that, at some unknown period, all the posterity of Adam will be established in everlasting peace and happiness. It will ever be difficult to quiet the conscience on either of these plans : for, though in the seasons of health and outward prosperity, there may be some found who are bold enough, either to reject divine revelation in the gross, or persuade themselves that they have nothing to apprehend from the threatenings of Scripture ; yet these fears will return upon them in the moment of danger and alarm. Such fears are the effect of that voice, which speaks to every man, and proclaims his accountability to that all-perfect Being who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. It is the voice of

God, who demands reasons of the infidel to justify him in casting off the authority of Scripture : It requires stronger reasons than he is able to produce. Therefore, in spite of all his ingenuity and fortitude, his own fears drive him from this refuge.

He next takes shelter under some form of religion ; for after all, man is a religious being ; that is, he must have some religion to quiet his fears, and keep alive his hopes. Unless, by a divine influence upon his own heart, he is effectually convinced, that, as a fallen creature, there is no remedy for him but Grace alone, he will not yield the point in dispute. He will adopt that form which exempts him from the humiliating condition of absolute dependence on divine mercy, for pardon and everlasting life. He rejects the doctrine of the Savior's divinity and satisfaction, and all that system of doctrine which results from an atonement. Now he flatters himself, that he has chosen a religion which will furnish the hopes and consolations which he needs, without self-denial and mortification of pride.

If, driven by argument from this refuge, he be compelled to yield something more to the necessity of divine influence, he yields with cautious reserve. He is careful to give up no more to this point, than will be barely sufficient to satisfy his conscience. He frames a system, which, in appearance, corresponds better with the Gospel, as a dispensation of Grace ; but still he takes care not to yield all

the glory to God. He chooses a system of doctrine, which does not bring him, as a dependant creature, to the foot of a sovereign Throne, there to plead for the mercy, without which he must perish.—Great ingenuity is necessary, to frame a system of doctrine which will appear evangelical, and seem to admit the necessity of divine influence, and yet make the creature in effect, his own savior. Nothing is more repugnant to the feelings of an unsubdued heart, than the idea of absolute dependence. It is the last point which men will admit. We have seen many efforts made, and many expedients tried, to frame systems that would satisfy men's consciences, and at the same time uphold them in pride and selfishness.—At certain periods, many have been disposed to adopt the Unitarian plan, well knowing that the consequences of this plan would be favorable to the idea of independence. The general voice of the Church, however, in the primitive times, was against this. A large majority of the Christian Church, in the most public manner, condemned this system as a Heresy. Next in alliance with this, was the doctrine of the Pelagians: but this plan was too barefaced. The necessity of divine influence, to renew sinners, and form them to holiness, was denied in a manner too direct and open to render it prudent to adopt this plan. It was repugnant to those views of divine truth, which mankind had in general received from the Gospel. It was condemned, as a Heresy, not by individuals only, but by public bodies. The purity of the apostolic age

had passed away when the doctrines of Pelagius were propagated; and many were disposed to adopt a system which would leave out the necessity of divine influence. It was thought prudent to frame a system which should have a more evangelical appearance, and yet allow to the creature something whereof to glory.—The Semi-Pelagian system was suited to this purpose. It appeared, as we have seen, to admit the necessity of Grace, or divine influence, though in effect this necessity is excluded.

Since the Reformation, the same efforts have been made, to evade the unwelcome doctrine of unreserved submission to the free Grace of God for pardon and life. The same refuges have been tried, and still the controversy with God is maintained. In some modern systems of doctrine, which have the same foundation with that of the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians, there is a greater effort to conceal the radical error under an appearance of truth. All these facts prove, that a controversy between God and man has been maintained; and that much ingenuity, on the part of men, has been exerted to evade the uncontrolled authority of their Maker. But why all these attempts to avoid the idea of dependance upon God? and why should we resist his authority? If it be so that there is a controversy between God and sinners, it will prove to be an unequal contest, and issue in the confusion and overthrow of all who resist the claims of their Maker. It is our safety, as well as

duty, to acquiesce in a way of salvation in which God may have all the glory.

2. The foregoing view of religious opinions leads to the conclusion that Heresy is of a changeable and fluctuating nature. It is worthy of observation, that when persons become established in the doctrines of Grace, they are generally uniform and stedfast in their adherence to these doctrines. Doubtless their stedfastness results from the cause which led them, at first, to hope for salvation only in the free Grace which is manifested by Jesus Christ. Such persons have laid the foundation of their hope in the doctrines of Grace, because they have been convinced of their guilt and ruin by nature. They have been impressed with a strong persuasion, that if left to themselves, they must perish. In the doctrine of salvation by Grace alone, they have found a remedy which is adapted to their condition as fallen and ruined creatures. At length they find relief, from their burden, in resting upon this doctrine. It affords them a source of consolation which they could no where else find.

Such being the cause which led them to adopt these distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel; being driven, as it were, to this foundation of hope, when every other refuge has failed them; it is easy to see why they are stedfast on this plan. They will not be easily persuaded to abandon a system, which has afforded relief and consolation after every other source has failed. Not every wind of doc-

trine can drive them from the only ground where they could find rest and peace for their souls.

The Gospel way of life will appear to such, at once, plain and consistent. There is no perplexity and confusion in the Gospel, to those who view it wholly as a dispensation of Grace. It is true, it will present mysteries to such, which they cannot comprehend ; yet in the exercise of that faith which gives them an interest in the blessings of redemption, their reason and will are subjected to the authority of God : and faith yields a humble assent to those revealed truths, which are beyond the comprehension of imperfect reason. Those, who have found their only relief from the burden of sin, in that free Grace which the Gospel reveals, will discover a harmony and consistency in the important truths which relate to the way of a sinner's reconciliation to God.

Persons who are not established in those truths, have no leading point to fix their attention to one system of doctrine. Departing from this great and comprehensive truth, that the reconciliation of a sinner is wholly the work of God, they traverse over those regions of error which have now been described.—At one time, they appear to admit the necessity of divine influence, to raise the sinner up to spiritual life : at another, they adopt a system which, in effect, supposes such influence to be unnecessary. Now they reject the doctrine of special Grace, in the reconciliation of a sinner,

and those which result from it, as divine sovereignty, election, and certain perseverance. Again, they deny the divinity of the Savior: and the Gospel is reduced to a mere collection of moral essays, accompanied with certain ordinances, without any important signification. But one step more, and their progress ends in deism.

If the reader will look around, within the circle of his acquaintance, he will find these remarks verified. He will see, that those persons are generally stedfast, who have found their remedy and consolation in the sovereign Grace of God. They appear to have obtained the surest relief, and to feel best satisfied with the doctrines of Grace. He will often notice a fluctuation in those who in any part reject these doctrines, which proves that they are not satisfied with the system which they have chosen. It does not afford security.

In the primitive times, the Unitarian system appeared in different shapes. Some Unitarians denied the divine nature and miraculous conception of the Son; some denied the former, and admitted the latter. Others denied that he was a person distinct from the Father. The Arians adopted a system, which, in appearance, was an approach towards orthodoxy. The Pelagian doctrine was exhibited in a new form, and expressed in words less exceptionable, by the Semi-Pelagians; but still the system was, in substance, the same. When

Arminius rejected the doctrines of the Reformation, his followers ran to every degree of distance from the system of the reformers. Dr. Mosheim informs us, that they went greater lengths than he presumed to go; for many of them became Socinians. We have seen all this ground traversed over, in times still more modern; and we see men shifting from the Arminian to the Arian and Socinian systems. This instability appears to be the natural result of that temper of mind, which leads men to reject the truth. Apostate creatures are aiming at independence: and therefore, they naturally fall upon sentiments which leave the interests of their salvation to their own power. It is with extreme reluctance that they submit to the idea of dependance on Grace alone for salvation. At the same time, their consciences cannot always rest quiet in the belief of doctrines which they are not able to support by the Scriptures. Two objects are to be secured. They must frame a system of doctrine which will not bring them to a sovereign Throne, as guilty and dependent creatures; but this system must have so much truth attached to it, as will conceal the radical error, and give it an evangelical complexion. To obtain these objects, there must, of course, be some inconsistency and fluctuation. When men are driven, by argument, from one system of doctrine, it becomes necessary to frame another which shall appear more consistent with the language of Scripture, without yielding the principal point in the controversy. It is matter of policy, that a system of doctrine,

which is essentially erroneous, should have some known and important truths attached to it, to satisfy men's consciences, and gain proselytes. In this we see the delusive and dangerous nature of Heresy, that while it contains a poison of deadly influence, it is hung round with labels of truth. By this mutability, it has eluded investigation, and evaded the force of argument. For when its absurdity in one form has been exposed, it immediately assumes another; and the friends of truth are reduced to the necessity of a new investigation and a different mode of attack. In every new form which it assumes, there is a new effort to conceal the radical error.—Were a system of doctrines to be suggested immediately by the prince of darkness, to counteract the moral tendency of the Gospel, it would doubtless hold forth to the view of men, so much truth as would be sufficient to conceal, from ordinary view, the error which is designed to effect the mischief.

3. We have seen a similarity in those systems of doctrine which have been, and are still, supposed to be Heresies. There is one system of truth, and another of error; although there may be various modifications of each.—Those who admit, in all its consequences, the general proposition, which, as we have supposed, expresses the spirit of the Calvinistic system, that our salvation is wholly of God, will also admit that every sentiment which is inconsistent with this, is essentially erroneous. Whether the reader admit or deny this proposition, he will see that the doctrines which

have been the subjects of animadversion in the foregoing treatise, have taken their departure from it: and some in a less, and others in a greater degree, have ascribed the work of salvation to the creature. He will therefore observe a similarity, in the general spirit and tendency of all those systems.—There have not been, therefore, so many different plans of doctrine, as some have been led to suppose; unless we admit, that different names, or a different manner of representing the same ideas, should be considered as constituting a real difference.

From the similarity which appears in the general character of Heresy, we infer, that it arises from one source, which is an unsubdued, selfish, and carnal heart. St. Paul refers it to this source; for among those sins which are manifestly the works of the flesh, or fruits of a carnal mind, he includes Heresies.* We are willing to admit, that persons may be placed in circumstances in which the truth may be concealed from them. They may be under peculiar disadvantages for knowledge; and they may embrace error when it is not the effect of enmity against the truth. Allowance is to be made for such cases: but when they persist in essential error, against all those means of light and conviction which the nature of the case admits, their error must be imputed to an evil heart of unbelief. It is exceedingly repugnant to the nature of pride, to admit the idea that we have fallen from God,

* Gal. v. 20.

and forfeited his favor ; and that our restoration must be the result of his Grace alone. Whatever the Gospel be, we must suppose it to be adapted to remove the moral disorders of the heart. Pride is one of these disorders. We must suppose, that the most salutary remedies to correct this disorder, would, at least in their first operation, be disagreeable to the feelings of a proud heart. From this reasoning, we may conclude, that mankind will naturally adopt sentiments, which uphold them in pride ; and that they will reject those which are calculated to humble them.

The heart is the fruitful source of errors. From the heart are the issues of life. From thence proceed evil thoughts : and through the influence of an evil heart of unbelief, sinners depart from the living God. If the hearts of men contained no enmity against the nature of divine truth, they would find but small difficulty respecting those doctrines which relate to the ground of a sinner's reconciliation to God. It will ever be difficult to reconcile these doctrines to the views of a carnal mind : yet, to a mind that is reconciled to God, and willing that all the glory should be ascribed to him, these doctrines appear reasonable and consistent.

If mankind were all governed by a right temper of heart, we have reason to suppose there would be, among them, no essential difference of opinion in regard to these doctrines. Some, it is true, would attain to greater de-

degrees of knowledge than others : yet, so far as all had attained, they would walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing. Jesus Christ has assured us, that "if any man will do his Father's will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."^{*} The plain meaning of his words is this : If any man have the disposition to receive and obey the truth, he shall know so much as will be necessary for his salvation. He imputes the unbelief of the Jews to a supreme desire of personal honor. He told them plainly, that the love of God was not in them ; and their opposition to his doctrines proved the truth of the declaration. "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not : if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not that honor which cometh from God only?"^{*} He has given us reason to be assured, that all Heresies are the fruit of an evil heart, when he says that opposition of heart to the truth, is the cause why men reject it, and that this is the ground of their condemnation.—"This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world ; and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."[†] Let us hear his own explanation in the following verse, "For every one that doeth evil, hateth the light ; neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be re-proved." It is evident, that light is here another term for truth, and darkness is synonymous with error. This is, therefore, the sum

^{*} John vii. 17.

[†] John v. 43, 44.

[‡] John iii. 19.

of Christ's argument : Truth is made manifest by the Gospel. "Light is come into the world." Men have rejected the truth, and embraced error. They "loved darkness rather than light," and "because their deeds were evil." This is given as the reason why they reject the truth, "because their deeds were evil;" and the truth makes this evil manifest.

4. If Heresy has its source in a heart which is at variance with the cause of truth, we must infer, that it is of great importance what religious sentiments mankind adopt. The system which they choose, will ultimately determine whether they be reconciled to God, or alienated from him. This conclusion is directly in opposition to a sentiment which prevails among a certain description of people, at this day.—It is now suggested by some, that it is not of material consequence what men believe, provided they maintain an upright character. This position is advanced under the cover of a popular name: for though it confound truth and error; and when carried to its full extent, it will destroy the distinction between virtue and vice; yet it is called *charity*. It will be difficult even to imagine a position of more dangerous tendency, especially when it has assumed the name of a Christian virtue, which is even greater than faith. It breaks down one of those barriers, which the Gospel has set up to inclose the Church, and circumscribe the efforts of her spiritual enemies. When this inclosure is removed, the way is prepared for the prince of darkness to come

into the Church, and disseminate every kind and degree of Heresy.

Before an army makes a direct attack upon a fortification, an advanced corps is sent to remove obstructions and prepare the way: and before the powers of darkness can make a successful assault, their agents are sent forward to remove from the minds of men those impressions which fortify them against such an onset. They cannot be more effectually prepared, for the designs of the enemy, than by a removal of the impression that between truth and error there is an essential difference. When they are persuaded that the doctrines, which they receive, will have no influence in determining their character, they will naturally choose that system which will uphold them in the indulgence of their favorite propensities.

Are we then to view with equal complacency, every system of doctrine? We cannot be justified in this, unless it appear that all the doctrines which men receive are equally pleasing in the sight of God. We are told that he sent his Son into the world that he might bear witness to the truth: but if he have done so much to furnish a testimony to the truth, there must be error as well as truth: and between them there must be an essential difference. Is God as well pleased when men reject, as he is when they receive, the witness of his Son? And when he has revealed any truth to mankind, in which his own glory and their ever-

lasting interest are concerned, is it, with him, a matter of indifference whether they receive it, or whether they pervert the true intent and meaning of the Holy Ghost?

Socinians suppose that Jesus Christ died, as a martyr, to bear testimony to the truth of his doctrines : and that this was the only important end which was answered by his death. Would he have laid down his life for a witness to the truth, if there were not, in his mind, an essential difference between truth and error? Would he have made such a sacrifice had he not believed it to be of great importance that this distinction should be maintained, and that mankind receive the truth? We should suppose, therefore, that they would not admit the idea that it is indifferent what doctrines men receive. We might expect that they would oppose that pretended charity, which confounds truth and error, and which, in effect, destroys the object for which Christ died. If mankind can be made to believe, that the doctrines, which they receive, will have little or no influence in determining their character and condition, we have reason to expect it will not be long before it will be deemed matter of indifference what lives they live. The transition from one step to the other, is natural and easy.

The doctrines of the Gospel are the basis of Christian morality. I speak of Christian morality, as distinct from that of the heathen philosophers, for there is a wide and essential difference. The morality, which the Scriptures inculcate, arises from the relations of mankind

to the Persons of the Trinity, and the distinct parts which they perform in the work of salvation. Here are new relations which heathen philosophers never did nor could discover: consequently there are obligations and duties resulting from these relations, which form no part of mere human systems of morality. Therefore the moral duties which the Gospel inculcates, partake of the peculiar nature of its doctrines: and the views, which mankind entertain, in respect to moral virtue, will vary according to their views of Gospel truth, and to the degree of importance which they allow to those doctrines which distinguish the Gospel from every human system.

A late author has ingeniously observed, "There is a region of truth, and a region of error." Heresy is not confined to subjects of mere speculation. It enters into men's views respecting the nature and extent of moral obligation. We shall find, that persons, who deny the most distinguishing doctrines of Scripture, entertain sentiments about the nature of morality which are far more lax, than do those who acknowledge and feel the importance of these doctrines.

The morality of the Gospel has enforcements peculiar to itself. These arise from our obligations to redeeming love. If all the arguments, which mere human philosophy has invented to engage mankind to devote themselves to the service of God, were so concentrated that they could act with united force on

the mind, their effect would be but small, compared with this Gospel argument, "ye are bought with a price; redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of the Son of God." As Christian morality derives its nature and enforcements from those truths which are peculiar to the Christian dispensation, we may conclude, that if men believe it will be indifferent what doctrines they receive, they will evade the force of those moral obligations, to yield themselves to the service of God, which arise from redeeming love. These effects indeed begin already to appear. That pretended charity, which pleads for the indifference of sentiments, begins to plead also for the indifference of actions. Hence we see, that characters are held up to public view as virtuous, and objects of God's peculiar complacency, who have no pretensions to virtue, and who have manifested either a total disregard of the truths of God's word, or open hostility against them. Such characters are often subjects of the highest panegyric, in those periodical publications which are most extensively diffused and read. In this we certainly see an attempt to destroy the distinction between virtue and vice; and this is the natural tendency of that charity, which pleads for the indifference of sentiment; or rather which confounds truth with error.

5. Heresy, in all its various shapes, has a tendency to uphold the cause of sin. With a slight attention to the spirit of the Gospel, any

one may see, that it was designed to subdue the pride of man, and beget a humble temper. —God declares, in reference to that day when the Gospel will produce its real and most extensive effects, that he alone will be exalted ; and the loftiness of men shall be brought low. St. Paul informs the Corinthians, that God had displayed his sovereign mercy in the Gospel, that no flesh should glory in his presence. “ But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption : that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”*

How does the Gospel beget humility ? Doubtless by teaching mankind that they have ruined themselves ; that they are the heirs of misery ; and that nothing, but a special interposition of divine mercy, can reinstate them in the privileges and blessings which they have forfeited by sin. It is obvious, that every system of doctrine which gives to mankind different views of themselves than those before mentioned, upholds them in pride. Whatever may be the object of pride, it is odious to God : but when men value themselves above others, on account of their supposed religious attainments, they are more offensive to God, than if their self-complacency arose from some natural endowments. The orthodox system effectually checks this spiritual pride in the saint. It teaches him, that he, by nature, is a child of wrath even as others ; and that the only reas-

* 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

on why he differs from others, is God's sovereign mercy: "God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ."*

That system of doctrine, which supposes that the principal reason why a saint differs from a sinner, is, that he has made a better use of his free will, or improvement of those means of light which the sinner enjoyed in equal measure with him, is friendly to spiritual pride. As it supposes, that his reconciliation to God depends on himself, it affords him an occasion of boasting. He may boast in the consideration that he has made a better use of the light which he had within, or that, of himself, he has chosen life, which the sinner does not choose.

It is observed, that something like self-complacency appears in persons who adopt this system. They manifest but little of the heartfelt humility and self-abasement of those who feel that they have, in themselves, no claim to the favor of God; and that all the hope, which they are allowed to entertain, of being in a state of favor, arises from that distinguishing Grace, which raised them up from ruin, and made them willing to choose life.

The Unitarian system takes away those persuasive motives to a life of holiness and vir-

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* Eph. ii. 4, 5.

tue, which arise from redeeming love. Let us suppose two persons of different religious sentiments, and calculate the different effects which their respective views of the Gospel will produce.—One is a Socinian, whose hopes of future happiness are not derived from the merit of the Redeemer's blood. Though he suppose that he has occasionally deviated from his duty, and Jesus Christ was sent into the world to correct such occasional wanderings; yet he believes that he is not a sinner in that sense which makes it necessary for a divine Savior to interpose, and be offered a sacrifice, to make it consistent for God to pardon him. He supposes, that such a degree of virtue is attainable, without any work of sanctification, as will render him fit for the heavenly state.—The other is convinced, that he is, by nature, wholly in sin; and of course, whatever are his hopes of happiness, they have their foundation in the sovereign Grace of God. This, in short, is the ground of his hope, that Jesus Christ has, by his death, delivered him from the condition of a child of wrath, and made him an heir of glory.—As the light in which these persons view the Gospel is exceedingly dissimilar, it is evident, that the practical effects which will be produced in them, will be very different. Nothing can impress so deeply on the mind, a sense of the infinite malignity of sin, as the consideration that a divine Savior has been offered up a sacrifice on the cross, to make it consistent with the holiness and justice of God to pardon the sinner. It is therefore very evident, that one of

the persons here supposed, will be deeply affected with those views of his criminality ; and from hence he will be influenced to the habitual practice of watchfulness and prayer. The other views sin as an inconsiderable aberration, which may be forgiven without injury : of course he will not be very strictly guarded against that which he considers of trifling consequence. While one is affected with the consideration of having acted a part which has made it necessary for a divine Savior to suffer and die, his heart is warmed with gratitude for this unspeakable gift. Seeing he is bought with a price, he feels that it is his reasonable service, to glorify God with his body and spirit which are God's. The religious system of the other, to say the least, does not contain those powerful motives to an unreserved dedication to the service of God.

These remarks are verified by the actual state of religion and morality, at different periods. It is a fact, that the moral state of mankind has been most pure, when they have received the doctrines of Grace. We read of the first Christians, that they continued steadfast in the Apostle's doctrine, and fellowship ; and we have seen, that during more than three hundred years after our Savior's ascension, the doctrines of the Church were orthodox. After the fifth century, until the Reformation, a different system prevailed. The Church of Rome rejected the doctrine of justification by faith alone ; and maintained the idea of merit in the creature. If we compare

the moral state of mankind, in the primitive ages, with those which preceded the Reformation, the result will be wholly in favor of the former. That the primitive Christians were more virtuous than those who lived between the sixth and the fifteenth centuries, does not even admit of a doubt. The reformers, as we have seen, separated from the Church of Rome on account of error in doctrine, and licentiousness in practice. This event was unquestionably a revival of evangelical religion, and it is no less evident that it recalled mankind, those at least who separated from the Catholic Church, from licentiousness to purity of life. It opened their eyes and gave them more correct views of the nature and extent of moral obligations. When the Calvinistic system was rejected in England, and the Arminian and Socinian doctrines adopted, the moral state of the kingdom had fallen far below the purity of that age, when the articles and liturgy were established. It is not enough to say the primitive simplicity and purity had subsided. They became the subjects of obloquy and derision. It was sufficient to render a man odious, if he were a Puritan; or in other words, if he adopted the doctrines of the Reformation, and conformed, in practice, to the primitive purity.

Amidst this general profligacy of manners, there were some exceptions. We have seen that the doctrines of the Reformation were retained by the Puritans; and by some of that description of people, they were brought to

New-England. They constituted the religious belief of our primitive Churches. All those systems of doctrine which the primitive Christians, and reformers, accounted Heresies, have been revived in this country: and let the reader judge whether the men of this age are, in general, more circumspect, prayerful, temperate and upright, than were their fathers. Is there not a manifest change, even in the views of mankind, respecting the evil of sin; and are not practices now deemed innocent, which were formerly supposed to be criminal, and which were thought worthy of public disapprobation? As the views of men change respecting the reality and importance of moral obligation, we experience an increasing prevalence of intemperance, dissipation, deception and fraud. These facts fully justify the conclusion, that Heresy is friendly to the cause of sin.

These proofs are still more obvious in the small scale, although the principle is the same. If we look to those places where there have been revivals of religion, and numbers awakened to new views respecting the importance of divine realities, though they may have been opposed, in times past, to the doctrines of Grace, they now gladly embrace them; for it is in this system that they find relief from the burden of sin. At such times, they will highly prize, and uniformly attend the worship of God, and the institutions of the Gospel. They are observed to be sober and circumspect, and guarded against even the appearance of evil.

They feel bound to devote themselves, without reserve, to the service of their God and Redeemer. It is furthermore observable, that when such attention subsides, and mankind grow indifferent about the doctrines of divine influence and Grace, they also become less conscientious and pure in their whole deportment. These appearances, on the small scale, correspond with that general progress of sentiment and morals which is observed at large in the Christian world. Without a special divine interposition to recall mankind to their duty and remedy, the natural progress of doctrine has ever been, from those which proclaim the sinner's absolute dependence on divine Grace for pardon and life, to those which leave to his own power the work of salvation. The state of morality has changed with this change of opinions. As the doctrines of Grace have been rejected, the general progress of morality has been from pure to profligate: or according to modern phraseology, as mankind have adopted liberal sentiments, their sense of the evil of sin has worn away, their views of moral obligation have become more liberal, and their lives more unrestrained.

In connection with these observations, we are naturally led to a reflection on the different effects of preaching. The primitive divines of New-England, without studied ornament were powerful preachers, and their plain evangelical discourses produced sensible effects on the minds of men. The subjects, which deeply engaged the attention of their hearers, were

the same which, by the preaching of the reformers, effected the greatest revolution which has happened since the days of Christ and his Apostles. Human depravity, and the necessity of divine influence to renew mankind to holiness, were the themes on which they dwelt : and these are subjects which will engage the attention of mankind. By the exhibition of such subjects, religion appears in an important point of view. They are calculated to affect the heart, and lead people to a self-application, to ascertain, if they possess this requisite temper ; if they are interested in the great salvation. When a people hear one preaching Christ crucified, as the only name by which any can be saved, and holding up to view the necessity of divine influence to form the soul to a fitness for communion with God, though they may, in their hearts, oppose such truths, yet they cannot rid themselves of the impression, that the preacher dwells upon a theme of vast importance. By such doctrines, he commends himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God : for whether men be pleased or not, they are conscious that he is faithful in the execution of his commission.

The plain doctrines of the Reformation have proved the means of the great revivals which have been in New-England, since the first settlement. These are indisputable facts, respecting which, all may satisfy themselves, by a little attention to the religious history of this country. On the other hand, who has heard of such effects having been produced under the

preaching of Socinian doctrines? There is indeed an imbecility in the preaching of those who leave out or reject the doctrines of Grace, and fall into the Unitarian system. This imbecility is not owing to any want of ability in the preachers themselves. It is in the matter of their preaching. Their discourses have all that exterior polish which, for a time, may captivate the ear, and sometimes they contain finished representations of the beauty and excellence of virtue. Yet, they will not reach the heart, so long as those enforcements to virtue, which arise from the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, are kept out of sight. That there is a beauty in true virtue, which commends it to universal regard, is admitted; and minds, which are formed to virtuous habits, can see and appreciate this beauty; but what hardened sinner, in whom habits of sin are fixed, like the leopard's spots, has been induced to break off from sin by righteousness, by an exhibition of virtue, detached from those doctrines by which it is enforced in the Scriptures?

Is it not observable, that every description of sinners can hear such discourses without emotion or self-application? While they admire the ingenuity of the preacher, the subject has not reached the heart. It has left the fountain of iniquity undisturbed. No one inquires what he must do, or how he shall attain to that virtue which will fit him for Heaven.

The little effect which results from this modern refinement in preaching, does not at-

ways arise from the want of ability. The preacher may be, not only a man of a cultivated taste, but of strong powers of argument and persuasion. All this, however, will be ineffectual so long as he does not avail himself of those powerful motives to virtue which the Gospel furnishes. He leaves out those subjects which are calculated to impress on the minds of sinners a sense of their guilt and danger, and need of a remedy. Plain evangelical preaching is the most effectual to arrest the attention of mankind. It awakens them from spiritual slumber, and leads them to inquire, if they possess the temper which will fit them for the worship and entertainments of the heavenly state.

We read of three thousand, who, on hearing one sermon, were influenced to forsake their sinful courses, and live in the practice of virtue. They were, however, first convinced, that they had lived in a state of enmity against God ; that they were wholly in sin ; and exposed to remediless ruin. They were pricked in their hearts, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do ? They were told that they must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins. This was an absolute pre-requisite in order to their reinstatement in the favor of God which they saw they had forfeited. Repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ constituted the deep and ample basis of their virtue. The discourse, which produced this surprising effect, was calculated to convince the hearers

of their personal guilt, in crucifying the Prince of life whom God had made both Lord and Christ.* If these Jews still believed that Jesus, whom they had crucified, were a man who had made himself equal with God, and therefore justly chargeable with blasphemy, is it probable they would have been so deeply affected with a sense of personal guilt? No, they were convinced, that with wicked hands, they had crucified the Prince of life.

Sinners can hear that preaching without emotion, and even with a degree of self-compacency, which leaves out depravity, the necessity of a divine Savior and perfect atonement, and a special influence from on high, to raise them up from ruin, to that holiness without which no man can see the Lord. The preaching, which they can hear without emotion, will have, at least, an indirect influence to confirm them in that course of sin which they have chosen.

6. The Unitarian system appears to be a substitute for deism. If this suggestion be deemed illiberal, it is not new. It was the opinion of Tertullian, whose words have been quoted.† That ancient and respectable writer supposed, that satan influences mankind to reject the divinity of the Savior, under a pretext of zeal for the unity of God; that in this way he contends against the truth; and that,

* Acts xi. 36.

† Chap. 5.

according to his success in this device, he counteracts the salutary effects of the Gospel. The enemy of righteousness does not always tempt mankind to an entire renunciation of religion. He adapts his temptations to their governing passions; and as their fears impel them to seek a refuge under some form of religion, it is his policy to suggest that form which is at the greatest distance from the spirit of Christianity, and yet sufficient to quiet their fears. He is at war with the Gospel; or rather with those effects which the Gospel produces in the hearts and lives of men. His opposition, however, is not always direct and undisguised. He approaches the fortress of Christianity, holding out the ensigns of friendship. He even offers to lend a helping hand, to fortify the outworks against the attacks of infidelity; but if he does any thing to strengthen the outworks, he does more to weaken and mar the internal structure. He takes care that what he builds up shall be no real defence.— Thus he transforms himself into an angel of light, puts on the habit of friendship, and by an appearance of candor and pretended charity, he prostrates every thing peculiar to the Gospel. By counteracting its tendency, he effectually accomplishes his purpose.

Dr. Priestley wrote to reclaim infidels; and by giving up the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, and taking away from the Gospel every thing which is offensive to a carnal mind, there may have been some infidels who were willing to meet him on the ground which he

had taken. It is still questionable, whether such converts can be called any accession to Christianity. Are they not still infidels? Or may they not meet the Doctor and those of his system, and yet retain the dispositions which at first influenced them to reject the Gospel? We may doubtless hold up to the view of infidels something, and call in Christianity, if it do not contain those offensive doctrines which at first set them at variance with the Gospel; and they will feel no objection against such a system.—On this plan, infidels are not converted to Christianity; but Christianity is stripped of those doctrines which give offence to infidels, and accommodated to their views.

If the real cause, why men become infidels, were investigated to the bottom, it would appear to be an opposition of heart to those doctrines which Unitarians reject. If, therefore, we take away these offensive parts of the Gospel, they will not object to that which remains, though they retain the temper which led them to infidelity. One proof, that the Unitarian system is a substitute for infidelity, arises from the fact that persons who were known to be inclined to the latter, have offered no objections against the former. It is observable, that they are pleased with the prevalence of Socinian doctrines.

It is but a short time, since we were alarmed with the progress of infidelity. It appeared open, and undisguised, as if confident of its strength, and sure of success, in the overthrow

of Christianity. Books, containing infidel principles, were industriously disseminated, and read with triumph. In the most obscure places, and among persons of but little reading, there rose up, of a sudden, many who were instructed in the popular objections against Christianity, furnished with that ridicule which bids defiance to argument. In a word, the enemy seemed prepared for a desperate effort against every thing pertaining to religion, its outward form and institutions, as well as the spirit of its doctrines.—Such an effort could not succeed. Man must have some religion. His hopes and fears impel him to this refuge: therefore the enemy varies the mode of his operation. Seeing mankind must have some form, and if he can bring them to rest on that which, though called Christianity, really counteracts the true design of the Gospel, his cause is as much promoted, and even more than it would be, if he were to put them in a position which is opposed to all religion.

That portion of mankind, who are not disposed to look far into the consequences of sentiments, will readily fall into a system which is called Christianity, and of course will serve to quiet their fears; but which requires no self-denial, subjects them to no painful mortification, and leaves to them the unrestrained indulgence of their inherent pride. They are not prepared to bid defiance to every consideration of religion, and join the infidel in his impious railery. They wish for some ground of hope, be it ever so unsubstantial; and only

the name of Christianity, even though its true spirit be kept out of sight, will serve to quiet their consciences. They suppose, that they have a claim to the character of Christians, if their lives be not distinguished for open vice ; accordingly they think that they are justified in applying to themselves the consolations of the Gospel, and hoping for its rewards. It is in this respect that Heresy, which takes away from the Gospel those truths which make it a doctrine according to godliness, is more pernicious, in the issue, than naked infidelity. It is calculated to draw more within its influence, and fix them in opposition to the Gospel.

In the case of infidelity, the enemy approaches Christianity in an undisguised manner. His attack is open ; and the friends of the Gospel can make a more certain and effectual defence, when the enemy is without, than if he were within the fortress.

The infidelity which a few years since occasioned great alarm, has in appearance subsided. There is less said respecting the prevalence of deistical sentiments : yet there is reason to believe, that the spirit of infidelity is not checked. It has only taken a new direction, and assumed a form which, though less alarming in appearance, we have reason to apprehend will prove in the issue not less pernicious. This opinion is justified by the revolution which appears lately to have taken place in religious opinions : for as open infidelity has subsided, the Unitarian system has prevailed, and re-

ceived a large accession of adherents. It is a fact, that persons who were known to speak disrespectfully of divine revelation, have been disposed to think favorably of this system.—Many have adopted it, without giving any evidence of a change in their religious views. This proves, that the Unitarian doctrine and infidelity are within the same region. They approach so near each other, and there is such a similarity in their most prominent principles, that one may be substituted for the other, without any change of temper.

Another proof, that the Unitarian plan is a substitute for infidelity, is derived from those complaints which Unitarians are known to make respecting the doctrines of the orthodox. It is suggested, that the latter, by exhibiting the Gospel in a forbidding light, drive men to infidelity. It is unnecessary to prove here, that the truth cannot be fairly exhibited in any light, which will make it acceptable to a carnal mind which is not subject to the law of God. If men will take refuge in infidelity, because they cannot endure a fair exhibition of the truth, the orthodox are not answerable for the consequences. They must make the truth manifest, and let it produce its effects, though these effects will be different on persons of different temper. To some, the Gospel will be a savor of life unto life; while to others it will prove a savor of death unto death.

What is the remedy which Unitarians propose for the evils of which they complain?—

Some system of doctrine must be exhibited which is level with the reason, and accommodated to the views of men; something, in which they will acquiesce, even while they are governed by the dispositions which incline them to deism. If the Unitarian doctrine is a remedy for the supposed evil, it is so because it strikes out those doctrines which are offensive to men who are predisposed to infidelity; therefore it prevents them from an open rejection of the Scriptures, because it approaches so near to deism, that it becomes a matter of indifference to such characters, which of the two they shall choose.

7. If it could be proved, that the doctrines which men receive will not have influence upon their lives, there would be no necessity, for the sake of public order, to guard mankind against the influence of Heresy. But if Heresy lead to immorality; if it be friendly to the cause of sin, it becomes a common interest to guard those institutions which have the most extensive influence on the public opinion. No institutions have so much influence as Colleges, in giving direction to the religious opinions of the community. Doctrines, which are there imbibed, are extensively diffused, and in a manner which is calculated to give them weight and influence. If the youth, who are designed for public life, receive sentiments that are essentially erroneous, the public will, in time, feel the consequences, in that prostration of morals, which has ever followed, when mankind depart from the spirit of Gospel truth.

In our view of the primitive doctrines of New-England, it was observed, that our Colleges were instituted and endowed by men, who received the doctrines of the Reformation. In their bequests, they had a view to the benefit of the Church, and especially to the maintenance of that orthodox system of doctrine which was the faith of the reformers and the primitive New-England Churches, and which they believed to be according to godliness. They used every necessary precaution, to guard those important institutions against the introduction of another system of sentiments than that which they intended to support by their munificence. According to the influence which the Colleges will have on the public opinion, so is the importance that they be still guarded, with pious care, against every degree of error; and the public, for whose benefit they were first instituted, have a right to expect that doctrines will be maintained and taught agreeably to the true design of the founders.

We have taken occasion to remark, that the Assembly's Catechism may be considered as expressing the religious belief of the primitive New-England Churches. While this system of doctrine was generally taught in families, it served as an inclosure to guard the public mind against the artifice of those who would introduce error. It furnishes the youth with a connected system of Gospel truth; and having this treasured in their minds, they are enabled to discern the point where error departs.

from the truth.—It is still observable, that where this system is taught in schools and families, people are more stedfast, and better guarded against the introduction of divers and strange doctrines, than they are where this is neglected. May we not impute that instability which is observed to be the spirit of the present day, to the neglect of this system? at least, is not this one among the causes that so many are carried about with every wind of doctrine? If there be ground for such an opinion, we see the importance of reviving the use of this Catechism, where it has been neglected. If it be desirable to parents, that their children be able to discern the difference between truth and error in religion; that they grow up with habits of stability; and that they be guarded against the cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive; they will do well to instil this excellent system of Gospel doctrine into their minds.

8. From the foregoing view we learn, that the enemies of the Gospel cannot avail themselves of that seeming diversity of religious sentiments which has appeared in the world. In reality there have not been so many different systems of religion as one would at first suppose. There is one system of truth, and another of error. Each of these have some variety in their modification; but in their general principles they are the same. The system of several denominations, which we have noticed, take their departure from one point of the orthodox plan, with this difference on-

ly, that some are removed to a greater distance from this point than others. Besides, the Scriptures have given us reason to expect all this apparent diversity ; and instead, therefore, of operating as an objection to religion, it is a proof that the revelation, which we receive, was given by inspiration of God, who alone could foresee the use which mankind would make of it from age to age. When we are informed, that the god of this world blinds the minds of men, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine unto them ; that the time should come, when men would not endure sound doctrine ; and that they would change the truth of God into a lie : and especially when we are forewarned, that the Gospel times should produce false teachers, who would bring in damnable Heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them ; we need not be surprised at the apparent diversity of religious opinions which we observe in the world : for in this we see that state of things, which the Scriptures have foretold. In these appearances, we may observe the fulfilment of Scripture prophecy ; and therefore they may strengthen our faith in the truth of divine revelation.

It will be admitted, that any diversity of sentiment on religious subjects, argues some defect ; but those, who use this as an argument against revealed religion, intend to have it supposed, that this defect lies, not in the temper of mankind, but in the revelation. Indeed, the objection derives all its seeming

weight from the supposition, that there is no impediment or alienation in the heart ; but that truth needs only to be made manifest, to be cordially received. It supposes, that the feelings of men would always harmonize with a system of doctrine which has no imperfection.

On the contrary, experience evinces, that this diversity results from those dispositions which reign in the human heart. That pride, which blinds the mind, and makes men totally opposed to truths which are humiliating ; that ambition, which prompts them to excite divisions, that they may raise themselves up to the head of a party ; that selfishness, which makes them deaf to every thing which is not subservient to personal gratification : In a word, that lust, which hardens the heart, and sensualizes the affections ; these passions, all which naturally refuse to be subject to the law of God, are sufficient to account for all that diversity which has appeared in this, or any former age.

While the pious man will lament any discordancy of religious opinions, his confidence in the truth of revealed religion will not be weakened, but rather confirmed : for, in this difference, he will see, that the religious state of the world corresponds with the sure word of prophecy. He will not adopt the rash conclusion, that because there are many false systems of religion, there can be none which is

true ; but truth will be none the less real, and precious in his estimation, though there be many counterfeits.

ADDRESS.

To those who adopt the Unitarian system.

WE are told, that the reason why the Gospel is, in a peculiar sense, worthy of all acceptation, is, that it reveals Jesus Christ as a competent Savior for sinners. Many have found, in this truth, the only remedy which is adequate to their disease. They have had those views of their exceeding sinfulness, and total inability to regain that interest in the favor of God which they have forfeited, that they have accepted, with joy, the offer of a divine Savior : one who is able to work salvation for them, magnify the law which they have broken, and raise them up to sit together with him in heavenly places. After trying, in vain, all other expedients for relief, they have at length obtained rest by trusting in that free Grace, which is manifested in Christ Jesus. Their faith essentially consists in a confident trust in the efficacy of the Savior's blood, to take away the guilt of their sin.

Should you unsettle this their faith, persuade them that they have trusted in a creature, and that consequently there has not been such an atonement as they have supposed, would you not, at the same time, destroy their consolation, take away the anchor of their hope, and leave them in a state of perplexing uncertainty, if not despair? Nor is this all; you will destroy those incitements to love and gratitude which they have found in the Gospel; you will make those motives ineffectual which arise from redeeming love, to engage them to live unreservedly to the glory of God.

Consider what wide mischief and misery may result from the prevalence of your doctrines. Your system is calculated for those who are fortified, by the pride of philosophy, against a feeling sense of personal guilt and unworthiness. It is adapted to the views of those who have never yet been convinced of the evil of sin, and who do not, of course, feel the need of an effectual remedy. It makes no provisions for such a state of mind. It is a cold and comfortless doctrine. It furnishes neither healing and consolation to a wounded conscience, nor effectual motives to a life of holiness and virtue. It makes of the Gospel a common thing—common with those systems which the mere light of reason has suggested.

Has it not been generally supposed, and is it not true, that, through the Gospel, there is a wide difference between the condition of those who live in Christian and heathen countries, as

it respects privileges and means of comfort? In what does this difference consist? I have always supposed that it consisted in this: The heathen never could answer this interesting inquiry, Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? For if his conscience, at any time, accuse him of having offended his Maker, his reason can discover no way by which offenders may be pardoned and reinstated in the favor which they have forfeited. The Gospel furnishes satisfactory information on this interesting subject. It exhibits a way for the pardon and recovery of the sinner, which is unspeakably safe and desirable. Does not your system destroy this distinction, and reduce mankind, in this respect, to the uncertainty of the heathen state?

Although, at present, you may not feel disposed to pay much regard to those impressions which are commonly called convictions of sin; and perhaps you do not believe in the reality of such convictions; yet as others have had these impressions, you are not beyond their reach. Should you at any time be convinced that you are wholly in guilt, and unable to atone for past sins, and recover that interest in the favor of God which you have lost, where will you find a remedy? Will it then afford you relief, that a creature has been inspired and sent to instruct mankind more perfectly in the principles of virtue? No, you will not find in this a remedy equal to the malignity of your disease. You will find no effectual relief, until you change your system of doctrine. Is it not imprudent to adopt a system which will not suffice for every condition?

The Apostles so preached Christ, that he became a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks. The reason, why he is a stumbling block to the former, is obvious. They expected a human Savior, to deliver their nation from temporal subjugation ; but the Apostles preached Christ crucified as the only name by which men must be saved. Have you any right to take this stumbling block out of the way ? Is it not unspeakably presumptuous, to remove that which gives offence to the Jews ? especially when the Apostle has said, that what is offensive to them, is the wisdom of God, and the power of God to them who are called.

The Gospel was foolishness to the Greeks ; and it is so now to many infidels, because it does not correspond with the principles of their carnal philosophy. Will it be any service to Christianity, should you attempt to make it appear otherwise than foolishness to them, so long as they continue infidels ? If Jews will meet you on your plan of doctrine, while their present prejudices against Christianity remain, the reason is, because your system is Judaism, or it approaches so near Judaism that their prejudices will not operate against it : and if those persons will acquiesce in your doctrine, who, it has been said, have been driven to infidelity by the preaching of the orthodox, the reason is, because your system is within the region of infidelity. It strips the Gospel of those doctrines which make it appear foolish to infidels. You have need, therefore, to in-

quire seriously, if you be not doing incalculable injury to Christianity, by counteracting its true design and tendency?

To those who have trusted in Christ as a divine Savior, and are established in the doctrines of Grace.

IF you have found, in the Gospel, a remedy for fallen and ruined creatures, because it is a dispensation of divine Grace, you will not be easily removed away from a system, which has furnished you with a sure ground of hope, when every other has failed. Are you not bound to stand forth in the defence of those truths, in which you have found so much security and comfort? As it is the duty of those, who profess subjection to the Gospel, to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints, it is more peculiarly incumbent on them at those times when efforts are made to confound truth and error.

It is necessary to exercise vigilance and firmness in the defence of truth. The enemy of all righteousness transforms himself into an angel of light. If he would disseminate an erroneous system of doctrine, he will use the policy to hold forth, on its surface, some important truths. He will bring it to as perfect resemblance of the truth as he can, without destroying the poisonous effects of the error which it contains. Its language will resemble that of inspiration; and, in some striking fea-

tures, it will carry the stamp of divine truth : but as a system of doctrine which is erroneous at its basis, is but little, if any, less pernicious, though it carry an evangelical appearance, and even though some important truths be interwoven with it, vigilance is necessary to discriminate error from the truth. It is not enough, that a system has some important truths. If it contain a radical error, the error, though concealed from a cursory view, will be diffused into every part, and affect the moral tendency of the system.

The friends of truth should habituate themselves to investigation. Having settled in your own minds what is truth ; and especially having fixed in your minds some fundamental truth on which the Gospel system rests ; endeavor to ascertain the point, from whence error takes its departure, that you may trace it to its consequences.

It is necessary to exercise vigilance, that you be not deceived by names. There is an imposing influence in certain words, which originally convey the idea of Christian virtues ; but by misapplication, they are used to give currency to error. No word, perhaps, has been more abused, by such misapplication, than *charity*. If the enemy would take away from the friends of truth even their means of defence, he will suggest, that, to insist on a particular system of doctrine is *uncharitable*. All, who have not lost sight of the original signification and use of the term *charity*, will

admit, that it is of the same import with benevolence, or love. The reason why this is greater than faith or hope, is, because, in the exercise of this virtue, creatures resemble their Creator. God is love; and therefore every one who loveth or exerciseth true charity, is born of God. It is greater than faith or hope, because it will endure forever. It is the temper of saints in heaven. They will become more charitable: that is, they will abound more in love, as they shall increase in conformity to God. In this sense, it is not uncharitable to insist on a particular system of doctrine, expose error in every shape, and guard mankind against its pernicious influence. It may be the highest act of charity which we can perform.

Can we suppose, that when St. Paul reasoned so largely on the excellence of charity, he intended that we should view, with equal regard, every system of doctrine? If it was his meaning, that Christians should not insist on any particular system, he was very deficient in charity, when he contended with those Judaizing teachers, who endeavored to unsettle the faith of the Galatians, respecting the ground of a sinner's justification. Especially did he transgress all bounds, when he ventured to pronounce him accursed, though it were an angel, who should introduce other doctrines than those which he and the other Apostles had preached. No, he was describing that love which is a bond of union among the holy family of God. He commended that benevolence

which we ought to exercise towards the persons of those, whose errors we should abhor and expose to public disapprobation.

You have need to exercise firmness, as well as vigilance ; and the more so, as it is the spirit of the present age to overwhelm, with reproach, all those who attempt to discriminate error from the truth, and expose it to public view. Immediately the cry of bigotry will be raised, to render it an unpopular attempt, and deter men, if possible, from any investigation. If argument will not suffice to put you to silence, that ridicule, which argument cannot reach, will be used. If you see an attempt to take away from truth its means of defence, and to confound all distinction, you may be sure it is in great danger ; and there is so much the greater necessity for firmness in its defence.

Shall we be told, that we are not appointed to judge and decide respecting the Christian character of others ?—We certainly are allowed, and it is a commanded duty, to judge, even of ourselves, what is right. If we are to judge and decide in regard to truth, it is absurd to say we are not to decide respecting error : for, in order to judge, we must discriminate one from the other.—We are assured, that a belief of the Gospel is necessary to salvation. We know, that God sometimes gives men up to strong delusions, that they should believe a lie, that they might all be damned ; because they receive not the love of

the truth, that they might be saved. We know, that there is such a thing as Heresy; and whatever it may be, its issue is most devoutly to be deprecated: for it destroys the soul. These considerations call for watchfulness to detect, and firmness to expose error. In this firmness, we have the Apostle Paul for an example. Without doubt, those false teachers, whose errors he exposed and combatted, reproached him for a bigot, because he insisted upon a particular system of doctrine. It is certain, that they attempted to injure his reputation, and diminish his influence.—What then? Did he abandon the cause? Did he suppose, that charity required him to yield the truth, and submit, in silence, to error? No, the pressure of opposition made him insist the more on those doctrines which he had taught. Charity prompted him to expose false religion, and guard mankind against its pernicious influence.

The primitive Christians and reformers supposed themselves authorized to judge what was Heresy. They supposed, that Heretics had forfeited the character of Christians; and that they were to be viewed as enemies to the cross of Christ. When they carried their disapprobation so far as to persecute and distress those whom they supposed to be Heretics, their conduct was reprehensible. Charity forbids all virulence, personal hatred, and injury. It will prompt men to exertion, to promote the present and future well-being of all who are within their influence. That true

benevolence, which aims at the most extensive good; which would secure to men a future as well as present happiness, will influence us to contend for those truths of the Gospel which point out the only way of acceptance with God. If we really exercise good will towards men, we shall desire that they may be guarded against error; and that the truth may produce in them its salutary effects. Therefore, arguments press upon us from the exigencies of the times, and from the importance of truth, to stand forth with firmness in its defence.

Finally, may we abound in that charity which is the bond of perfectness; that charity which will influence us to approve of what God approves, and abhor that which he abhors; that charity which will prompt us to be subservient to the highest interests of our fellow men—to discountenance whatever of error we observe in them; and to guard them against its destructive influence: and to contend for the truth, that it may produce its salutary effects; and that all may find the consolation which is in Christ.

While we contend for the truth, let us avoid all asperity of manner, all reproach, personal hatred, and injury. Let us endeavor, by kindness, and love unfeigned, to commend that truth, which we deem most precious, to the regard of others. It is in the exercise of this charity, that the children of God are made manifest..

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